

Blue Blood

Owen Johnson

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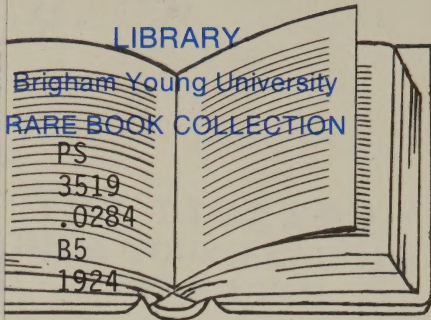
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Blue Blood

By Owen Johnson

Lawrenceville Stories

THE PRODIGIOUS HICKEY

THE VARMIN'T

THE TENNESSEE SHAD

SKIPPY BEDELLE

STOVER AT YALE

THE WOMAN GIVES

VIRTUOUS WIVES

THE WASTED GENERATION

THE SALAMANDER

MAKING MONEY

THE SIXTY-FIRST SECOND

THE SPIRIT OF FRANCE

BLUE BLOOD

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1924

BLUE BLOOD

A DRAMATIC INTERLUDE

BY

OWEN JOHNSON



BOSTON

LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

1924

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Chapter I

In the spring of 1920, at that period when the bonanza prosperity of the war was over and, like some rubber toy which collapses in a shrieking protest, the great inflation was flattening out amid the cries of its victims and the angry mutterings of disillusioned labor; when industry was struggling to work out the readjustment under the threat of gigantic strikes; at that moment when the war investor as well as the war profiteer daily beheld the crumbling of values that swept away their fortunes as rapidly as they had grown, two reporters arrived late in the afternoon at that corner in the Murray Hill district where stands the home of Alonzo Majendie, — not to be confused with Bernard Majendie, a cousin who went down in the panic of 1903, but Alonzo Majendie of the Fidelity Trust, a landmark in New York finance, associated with Gunther and Company, Forsheim and Marx in the great period of corporation reorganization.

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The house, occupying full one half of the block on the avenue and running back one hundred feet with the added ballroom and garage, the twenty-five bedrooms, conservatory and quarters for eighteen servants, was yet so modest in its brown-stone exterior that it gave one the impression that a dowager in brown silk ruffles of the Victorian period would make on entering a ballroom among the clinging and revealing toilettes of the present day. It was of a period when manners and customs rigidly circumscribed the privacy of the home and dining out at restaurants was considered almost a social descent into Bohemia. Built in the middle of the last century in the English Tudor style, severe, classic, dignified, in marked contrast with the parvenu palaces of upper Fifth Avenue, which with every ostentation of outward detail advertize the luxury of the new leaders of society, the Majendie home, with its brown-stone façades, seemed deliberately raised in studied disregard of the curiosity of the passing throng. Whereas the great houses of the day are but the reflection of the architect, it proclaimed the austerity and the rigid disdain of a family that for generations had held unchallenged its social primacy and its social privacy.

The two reporters mounted the first steps of the terrace, crossing the narrow lawn worth its weight in gold, and rang the bell. Instantly the door was opened by a footman in yellow and black livery who examined them with unfavorable curiosity.

"Mr. Thornton DeWitt to see Mrs. Majendie," said the shorter of the two, an immaculate dapper man approaching forty, in a smart cut-away, with a white edging to the vest. He added, with an Anglo-American intonation, "By appointment, my good fellow."

"Reporters?" said the footman, barring the door.

"Take my card to Phillips," said DeWitt, opening a neat case in black moiré and tending a card with equal insolence.

The footman hesitated, glanced at the card and finally, evidently under orders, closed the door and left them waiting in the outer vestibule.

"Damned little puppy," said DeWitt, feeling that he had missed his effect on his companion.

Burgess, known as the star man, lean of face, careless of dress — his clothes hung on him and looked as though he had not had them off for nights — taciturn, a bundle of nerves, shrugged his shoulders.

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"Reporters will be thick as flies around her pretty soon and just as popular."

The footman returned and ushered them into the great white marble hall, where a second footman received their coats and hats.

"Sorry, sir, but we have to be very particular."

Burgess experienced the same shock of surprise that each new visitor experienced in penetrating beyond the outer defenses. Nothing could exceed the luxury that all at once burst upon him but it was a luxury without ostentation, distinguished by good taste and the quality of appropriate selection. The great marble stairway turned and rose by easy flights to the upper stories; a fountain by Jean Goujon flung a tiny spray against the series of Aubusson tapestries that relieved the stone austerity. They passed through a small salon, that even to the boiseries and the appliques was of the purest Directoire transplanted bodily from a famous château, into the main drawing-room with its panelled ceilings, its Louis XIII furniture in the original tapestries, its silken rugs from Bokhara, worthy to hang on the walls, and its eight great panels by Watteau.

"You can wait here," said the footman, who had discovered that they were, after all, reporters.

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"Rather neat?" said Thornton DeWitt, who in his rôle of the chronicler of social doings had acquired an easy familiarity with luxury. "My boy, a million dollars looks down upon you."

"What an auction it would be!" said Burgess, sticking his hands in his pockets and whistling to himself to conceal his surprise.

Before he could continue his thought, Phillips, the butler, one of the aristocrats of the world below stairs, entered with his noiseless step, a face done in wax, with the glance of a field marshal and a silken voice.

"Good afternoon, Mr. DeWitt. Mrs. Majendie should be in any moment, sir."

Then perceiving Burgess, he looked a little doubtful.

"Quite all right," said DeWitt, consulting his watch. "Fact is, we're extremely punctual."

"Beg pardon, sir," Phillips, with a slight raise of his eyebrows towards Burgess, who with his hands still sunk in his pockets was examining the room, said. "Mr. Majendie's orders are most strict as regards reporters. Of course, in your case, sir —"

"Mr. Burgess is my assistant," said DeWitt superbly.

"That is quite satisfactory, sir," said Phillips, with an aristocratic inclination of his head —

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as aristocrats no longer bow. "I took the liberty, sir," he added, as a footman appeared with a tray on which were set a decanter and glasses. "Knowing how you appreciated,—"

"No liberty at all, Phillips; Mrs. Majendie is always so thoughtful. I say, Burgess, a glass of port? Port it is, is n't it, Phillips?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't care if I do," said Burgess, who tipped up the proffered glass and swallowed it at a gulp.

"My boy, my boy," said DeWitt, holding up his glass to the light and sipping it in dreamy degustation, "a sacrilege. You are drinking genuine old crusted port, — the Majendie port; am I right, Phillips?"

"Yes, sir, laid down in 1868 in —"

"Damn good," said Burgess, who despite a warning look from his companion held out his glass to be replenished.

"Wonderful — wonderful stuff," said DeWitt, who finished delicately and set down his glass.

"If you gentlemen care to smoke—" said Phillips. "Mrs. Majendie may be a trifle late, sir."

"Why, yes, Phillips, thank you."

Burgess selected a cigar in turn, examined it with satisfaction and then, changing his mind, put it in his pocket.

"By the way, Phillips," he remarked casually, "when did Mr. Majendie return from Chicago?"

Immediately suspicious, Phillips took refuge in impassibility.

"I am not in the habit of divulging information concerning Mr. Majendie's movements," he said stiffly and left the room.

"They do things rather well here. By Jove, the old boy knows cigars," said DeWitt, waiting until they were alone. Then, sinking into a comfortable corner of the sofa, he said with a frown, "I say, old man, no more breaks like that last one."

"Like what?" said Burgess, who, being near the box of cigars, selected another for the future.

"Trying to pump Phillips. As a matter of fact, Burgess, I don't like this business, I don't like it at all. This masquerading as my assistant is n't playing the game — not playing the game at all. My position in New York society is a peculiar one — a confidential one. I have never abused the privilege. I don't like it at all."

"Can't help it," said Burgess, lighting a cigarette. "The old man's orders. Get to Majendie at once — if you have to use a jimmy."

DeWitt shook his head and again fastidiously

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repeated his distaste, but at this moment Phillips, returning, announced:

"While you are waiting, perhaps you might like to look over the photographs of the costume ball next week. The first batch have just come in."

"The very thing I wanted," said DeWitt, springing up eagerly. "Very glad indeed to look them over, Phillips, thank you."

Phillips, on whom Burgess had made a distinctly unfavorable impression, closed the box of cigars and, picking it up, departed.

"Rum old undertaker that," said Burgess. "What's this about the costume ball?"

"What part of the paper do you read?" said DeWitt in surprise. "Nothing else has been talked of for months. It's quite the outstanding feature of the social season. Fancy not knowing that!"

"I remember now," said Burgess. "So they're planning the big splurge. Well, that's good news. All the better story."

"Look here, Burgess, just what are you hinting at?" said DeWitt suspiciously. "I don't know why you are taking this way to get to Mr. Majendie. Matter of fact, I prefer to be in ignorance. But all the same, what do you mean by an auction and a good story and all that sort of rot?"

Burgess enjoyed his moment with a little superior smile.

"Don't be surprised if to-morrow something starts to break in the 'street'. There's a big fight on. In fact, there's hell to pay. Say, what part of the paper do you read? Have you waked up to the fact that some one is getting away with a corner in International Motors? Suppose our friend here is on the wrong side?"

DeWitt shrugged his shoulders and made a gesture with his hand which embraced the room.

"Well? How can that involve anything like this?"

"That's what I'm here to find out."

"My dear boy, you don't know what you're dealing with," said DeWitt with pitying superiority. "Do you realize that here you are in the presence of not one, but three fortunes! Majendie and the Fidelity, that's one. Mrs. Majendie is a Highgate, — the Kilblaine millions, — and I had forgotten the other sister, Cora Majendie, Mrs. Chalfonte, another million or two. Absurd!"

"The higher they are, the harder they fall, Bill."

"But the Fidelity?" said DeWitt, frowning at his familiarity.

"The Fidelity Trust? Why not?" said

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Burgess, and with the irrepressible spirit of irreverence of the press he flung a leg over an arm of the settee and continued, "Say a few things you don't know about these tip-toppers. The whole damned bunch is walking on isinglass these days. When standard stocks are down fifty points, you can reckon it in millions." He paused and, gazing around the room, said suddenly, "My God, if it is only true! What a whale of a story!" Each sees life from his own needs. A soldier passing through the most entrancing landscapes perceives gun emplacements and enfilading fires. Burgess, the reporter, was thinking only of the drama of a smashing story. "Hello. That's a good idea about the photographs," he said suddenly. "Just the thing if the sky blows up to-morrow. Let's have a look. Get hold of a family group if you can. Who's the old girl with the beads?"

"You are speaking of Mrs. Majendie — Mrs. Alonzo Majendie," said DeWitt with the air of one defending a friend. "And the 'beads', as you call them, are the famous Tonquay necklace."

"Did n't recognize her in the wig. Grim old girl. The old guard dies but never surrenders."

"Mrs. Majendie has gone off slightly in the last two years — the social strain."

"Had a lot of work done on her, I'll bet," said Burgess without reverence. He turned to another photograph. "And these birds?"

"You are now referring to Mrs. Alonzo Majendie's youngest daughter and her husband," said DeWitt with a slight sarcasm which was lost on his companion. "One of the sisters married the Hon. Fitzroy Clavenden, eldest son of the Duke of Battersea. Another sister is Mrs. Thomas Ronalds — the famous Mrs. Tommy Ronalds. Another sister has just announced her engagement to the Count Toloni-Baretta."

"I see. The sisters have been busy — but what did this gink ever do?"

"He? He married a Majendie."

Burgess looked at him quickly and, perceiving that his indignation was not assumed, smiled and said with false humility:

"Excuse me! I see. It's a profession, is n't it? Well, he looks it."

DeWitt, who had been gazing at a proof in respectful admiration, now tendered it to his companion with an appreciative rise of his eyebrows.

"There you are!"

"The widow?"

"Mrs. Rita Kilblaine!"

Burgess emitted a long whistle.

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"Now you're showing me something. Damn neat. Say, this gets me. A woman with that look could swing any jury."

"Mrs. Rita Kilblaine," said DeWitt carelessly, "I consider one of the very smartest women in New York society."

"What's the costume?"

"Lucrezia Borgia, a rather well-known Italian, Burgess."

"I know it. I know it. Some thoroughbred all right," said Burgess, passing over the patronizing manner. "Why the hell did she marry that white-livered old Turk of a Silas Kilblaine! Does n't go with that look. The millions, I suppose."

"As a matter of fact, Kilblaine behaved damned badly. Left his fortune to an art museum."

"Did n't she get a thing?"

"Nothing at all! One little million perhaps — but nothing at all."

"The son of a gun. Why did n't she break the will?"

"Pride, my boy," said DeWitt loftily. "The Majendies aren't the pork and steel aristocracy — real estate and banking — five generations. Blue blood, my boy! Why, in 1640 a Majendie —"

But at this moment, at a rustle in the outer room, DeWitt suddenly sprang to his feet and stood at rigid attention. Mrs. Majendie had arrived.

She came tripping in, followed by a completely blond young man who carried a package under his arm;—a tiny little woman, with the figure of a young girl, youthfully dressed, the neck cut low and protected by a diamond dog collar and a double row of pearls.

“Looking at the proofs?” she cried in a shrill falsetto which carried well in restaurant and at the opera. “How d’you do, Mr. DeWitt? You know Brady, of course?”

The gigolo in question nodded imperceptibly and immediately proceeded to put down the package as though he had been staggering under its weight, saying,

“Suppose I toddle along?”

“Topsy, don’t you dare! I want your advice,” said Mrs. Majendie, who then perceived with a start that DeWitt was not alone.

“Allow me to present my assistant — Mr. Burgess, Mrs. Majendie — Mr. Carleton Brady.”

“Oh!”

“We are making a very great feature of the ball, you understand,” said DeWitt in explana-

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tion, after the introductions had passed like a tepid breeze.

"Did you like the one of me?" said Mrs. Majendie eagerly.

"Tremendously! I was tremendously taken with it."

"Really? It's not bad of the costume. I think the last ones,—"

 She turned to Brady.

"Topsy, open up the proofs."

Brady obeyed with calculated languor.

"But this is really excellent of you, Mrs. Majendie."

"Do you think so?" she said doubtfully. Then, taking up a new proof from those she had brought, she added, "I think this *is* better. The full face, you know."

"This *is* better," said DeWitt instantly. "Very dignified, Mrs. Majendie — *très grande dame!* I am particularly delighted, because of course we wish to make this our central feature. Now if we could print this, and this of Mrs. Kilblaine and this family group?"

"Three!" said Mrs. Majendie in pretended surprise. "You really want three!"

"I hope, I sincerely hope, Mrs. Majendie, that we may have at least three," said DeWitt in his most impressive manner. "The public curiosity is tremendous. From now on we are

planning to use a column a day. May I tell you something strictly in confidence? The account of the ball is to be made front-page stuff. Indeed it is," he continued impressively, at her delighted look of incredulity, "and that has n't happened since the days of Ward McAllister. We consider this quite the most important social function of years. Why, we have over fifty photographs already — offered to us. You'll be amused to know that Mrs. Dalgeesh alone has sent us six!"

Mrs. Majendie yielded on the instant. She called Topsy to her assistance and began a careful process of elimination. DeWitt so far forgot himself as to send a wink of triumph to Burgess, who had just returned him an amused nod of congratulation, when, to the surprise of everybody, Mr. Majendie, followed by a footman with a travelling bag, came into the room and stopped short with evident annoyance. He was slight, with remarkably small hands and feet, thin-waisted, erect, and carried himself with the manner of a man long accustomed to the advantages of his personal appearance, which was set off by a still remarkably handsome head, dark eyes and a thin imperial slightly touched with gray.

"Why, Alonzo!" said Mrs. Majendie with a start

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of surprise, and going to him she added, "What's wrong? I did n't expect you for a week!"

"Change of plans, my dear," he said smoothly, but with an uneasy look at the three men.

"I was just going over the photographs for the ball with Mr. Brady and Mr. DeWitt," said his wife, looking at him with a little alarm. "You remember Mr. DeWitt, don't you?"

"Perfectly," said Mr. Majendie, who bowed stiffly and nodded to the footman, who then disappeared with his valise.

"And I hope you remember me, too, Mr. Majendie," said Burgess quietly.

Majendie looked around with an involuntary twitching of his shoulder, stared at Burgess and then at the others as though demanding an explanation.

"This seems to me to be a wholly extraordinary intrusion," he said slowly.

"It's really not DeWitt's fault, sir," said Burgess quickly. "I had to use him to get to you." He paused and looking him steadily in the eyes added, "It was absolutely necessary to see you to-night, sir."

For a moment their glances remained steadily on each other. Then Mr. Majendie said in the low, almost caressing, tone which was a quality of his voice:

"Well, Burgess, if you're here, you're here. Elise, if you and your friends will leave us a moment — I happen to be in a hurry."

She spoke a hurried word to the two men who immediately took up the proofs and went into a further salon, then approaching her husband with an anxiety she did not disguise, said, all in a flutter:

"Alonzo, something's wrong! What is it?"

"Nothing in the least, Mrs. Majendie," said Burgess suavely. "I just happened to have a private and important message which had to be delivered personally to your husband. That's all, I assure you."

She hesitated a moment, looking from one to the other, seeking to discover the truth, unconvinced. Then, at a sign from her husband, she went out, saying: "I shall want to see you, Alonzo, in a moment."

"Well, Burgess, you know I'm always glad to see you. You have access to my office —" Suddenly satisfied that they were alone, Majendie stopped and said on a different note, "May I ask why you have forced yourself on me like this?"

"Under orders, sir," said Burgess. "You know what that means. Perhaps you'll be just as glad I came."

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“Come to the point. What is it?”

Then Burgess, fastening on him his inquisitorial glance, said point-blank:

“Is there any statement you would like to make, personally or as the head of the Fidelity Trust?”

Chapter II

Majendie met the question with a look of blank surprise either genuine or so skilfully assumed that the reporter was left in doubt.

"Don't talk in riddles, Burgess," he said, remaining standing. "I told you I was in a hurry. Come to the point."

"Mr. Majendie," said the reporter, a little shaken in his confidence by the other's self-possession, "in your absence, International Motors has jumped from 150 to 450 with no stock offered."

"It closed at 600 to-day. Every one knows that. Evidently a corner."

"Rather hard on the short interest."

"What is the short interest?"

"Now he is beginning to lie," thought Burgess. He smiled and said, "I imagine you can give me some information on that point?"

"No. I am not interested."

"That is all you care to say?"

"That is all."

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"Of course, I think it only fair to tell you . . ."

"That the *Record* is about to publish a sensational story to-morrow morning," said Majendie, laughing, "and you, of course, have come here to give me the opportunity of protecting myself. That is the way you usually phrase it, is n't it?"

"This time it happens to be true — unfortunately."

"Well, what's the story?"

"You are believed to be ten thousand shares short, personally, or as head of a syndicate."

"You may deny that for me," said Majendie without concern.

"In whole, or in part?"

"Both."

"Our information is very circumstantial."

"It always is. It is wrong. I do not speculate."

The reporter took out a cigarette, lit it and said impudently, "Mr. Majendie, do you play poker?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"You ought to." He abandoned his first attitude of deference and, irritated by the utter impassiveness of the banker, suddenly assumed the aggressiveness of a prosecutor. "Our story

seriously — mark the word *seriously* — questions the stability of the Fidelity Trust.”

“Any such statement will be made the basis of a criminal action,” said Majendie sternly. “I warn you of that.”

“Yes. I don’t say we shall go so far as to mention specifically the Fidelity. But inferences will of course be drawn. There are ways. We happen to know a little more than you think.”

“I am interested.”

“Yesterday afternoon there was a conference at J. P. Gunther’s at which Slade, Gunther, Forsheim and Christiansen were present,—Christiansen, first vice-president of the Fidelity.”

“Then you know more than I do,” said Majendie with his set smile.

“Were you called back as a result of that conference?”

“I was not.” The conversation had been conducted in rapid fire. Majendie’s denial was delivered with the snap of finality. “Now, if you have no more questions, Burgess —”

“That is all you wish to say?”

“All.”

“I’m sorry,” said the reporter, “I hope you will excuse the directness of my questions and I trust that you will understand that before publishing the story to-morrow morning —”

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"You won't publish that story," said Majendie quietly.

"Before publishing the story," continued Burgess, shrugging his shoulders. "We have done everything to give you ample warning — as a friendly act."

"Will you inform your chief," said Majendie, with a little grim amusement, "how much I appreciate his friendly act."

Burgess bit his lips.

"That is all you care to say, Mr. Majendie?" The repetition had the force of a threat.

"That is all. By the way, next time you want to reach me, do so through my office. Believe me, it's a better way than this. Good afternoon, Burgess."

"If after due consideration," said the reporter slowly, "or any further enlightenment that may come to you, you prefer to make a statement, —"

"I sha'n't," said Majendie, still smiling. He went to the table and rang.

"The presses do not close until midnight. We are at your service."

"Very kind of you. By the way, a word to you. Be very sure what influences are using you and for what purposes, before you publish that cock-and-bull story! Good afternoon."

He waited until the reporter, ill at ease and perplexed, had reached the door. "Burgess!"

"Yes, sir."

"You won't publish that story. Mark my words," he said as a parting shot. "Phillips, see that Mr. Burgess gets *out*."

When the butler had returned he found his master thoughtfully pacing the floor.

"I'm sorry, sir, that such a thing happened," he began nervously.

"Never mind. I understand. Is Parkins in?" he said, referring to his private secretary.

"I believe he is, sir."

At this moment the telephone rang from the desk. At a sign from his master, Phillips took up the receiver.

"The New York *Times* calling for you again, sir."

"Out — not home yet."

"Mr. Majendie has not returned. No, don't know when," he added, putting up the receiver.

"Get Parkins on the house telephone."

"Yes, sir."

"I'll speak to him." He took up the receiver. "Parkins? Hello! What? Just back. Come down to the library. Has Christiansen— Um-m. All right. Come right down." He put up the receiver and turned to Phillips. "If any

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one calls up, remember I am still in Chicago. And now, Phillips," he said, in a matter-of-fact tone, "find out if Mrs. Kilblaine is at home."

"Yes, sir. Will you dine with her to-night?"

"No — probably not. Ask Mrs. Majendie to come here."

"Very well, sir."

Chapter III

When Mrs. Majendie hurried in her husband saw at once that she had taken alarm and that the first thing to do was to restore her shattered equanimity. There was no pretence of affection between them. For a long time it had been perfectly understood between them that each had the privilege of independence. His wife's friends were not his friends, or her ways his. But the threat of a common danger brings with tragic irony the realization of a common bond, no matter how loosely it be held.

She ran to him and seized him by the arm.

"Alonzo! This reporter! What does it mean?" she cried, like a frightened child, "and the newspapers ringing you up all day long. Oh, my dear, what *is* going on?"

"There is always something going on nowadays," he said lightly. "But that's what finance consists of in these strenuous times, — riding over one shock after another."

"Alonzo, I'm frightened," she cried, and the

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thin jewelled fingers dug into his arm until they hurt.

"There, there, what a scatterbrained child you are," he said, laughing down at her. "Now, now, nothing to worry over! A little annoying contretemps, that's all, — over in twenty-four hours — but annoying." She allowed herself to be deposited in a chair, breathless, with parted lips, following him intently as he continued, "You see, we are weathering a difficult period; the period of readjustment, after a period of great inflation. That's what war leaves. While we are waiting for production to resume, credits are very shaky — extremely shaky. Some of the biggest industrial concerns to-day owe so many millions that they have stopped counting them." He crossed his legs, caged his hands and said whimsically, "In Wall Street we say the safest are those who owe the most."

She sprang up.

"Alonzo! Not another panic! My God, I could n't go through another panic."

"No, no," he said, motioning her to resume her seat. "Panics are always second-class affairs. The big men never permit a panic when they are involved. Eight years ago, it was different. I was caught between two

groups. To-day, there is n't any one who is in a stronger position. I have no enemies to speak of and the biggest men in the Street are my friends, my *personal* friends. Come, you know that. If I take the trouble to explain a perfectly natural thing to you, it is, my dear Elise, to show you how, just now, a very little thing may prove embarrassing, that is, temporarily embarrassing."

The woman who did not love him, but who had lived thirty years at his side, was not so easily convinced.

"Oh, Alonzo," she said tearfully, "something tells me — your look — your manner — just as it was eight years ago!"

"I should n't be wasting my time sitting here if it were," he said abruptly. "Really, Elise, you are ridiculous. These things happen every month — really every month."

"Really?"

"Every month."

"I am in no danger?"

"Not the slightest. Some one has been attacking me in my absence and I have got to strengthen my collateral a little. That's all."

"Oh, thank heaven!" she said, dabbing her eyes with her handkerchief. "I really could n't stand any more worries just now."

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"Worries, what worries?"

"The ball!" she cried, indignantly. "Do you think that's nothing? From morning to night, I have to —"

"Yes, yes," he said impatiently, and being pressed for time, he added, "As a matter of fact, Elise, you could help me out a little."

She wheeled on him with a gasp, her handkerchief in her agitation falling to the floor.

"I? You want me to save you? I knew it! I knew it! I had a premonition."

"For heaven's sake, Elise, behave yourself," he said roughly. "I can't go through a scene. Kindly listen to me calmly."

She stood wide-eyed, trembling.

"There is no risk. These things are all a matter of credit. I need a little extra collateral before the opening of the stock exchange to-morrow."

"Credit! Collateral!" she repeated stupidly.

"There is not the slightest reason to be frightened. I ask you, because — well, because it is the simplest way to handle a temporary difficulty. I am not placing it on the ground of affection, but you do bear my name; my children are your children and it does hurt my pride to have to go out to others. Can't you understand that it is more agreeable to keep such things

in the family, particularly when you have plenty of money?"

"My fortune?" she cried, retreating instinctively.

"Which, madam, I have doubled for you," he said sternly. "Besides this house —"

"But that's mine," she cried hysterically. "My private fortune is all I've got. You want me to sacrifice that!" She continued to retreat from him, looking back in horror, and he saw her as she was, a vain, frightened, selfish little atom, incapable of an unselfish action. "No, no, I can't, I won't!"

"We'll drop it," he said abruptly, realizing all at once the impasse. "Say no more."

"You know our agreement after that dreadful panic. You know what you promised after you nearly ruined me. I — I, oh, there is only one thing to do, I must consult my lawyer."

"Consult your lawyer!" said Majendie, reddening as though he had received a blow in the face.

"Remember our agreement. You promised never to imperil my private fortune again. You did. You promised."

"She is capable of shrieking it to the whole world," he thought uneasily. "I must stop her at all costs." Aloud he said frigidly,

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"Enough! Thank you for your anxiety. I'll arrange the matter elsewhere. Stop the scene, my dear Elise; it is no longer necessary."

"Now you're angry." She resorted profusely to her handkerchief, her breath still catching a little. "You're angry. But really, I don't think you have a right to be. I don't think a man has the right to risk a woman's fortune. And besides, I don't understand anything you've been telling me." She sniffed once or twice and added, "That's why I spoke about my lawyer."

"Quite right. Besides, the matter is not sufficiently important."

"But you've told me nothing," she said, suddenly returning to her suspicion. "You are in no real danger? No? You're sure? Oh, you don't understand me! It's the ball that's got on my nerves, Alonzo."

"I understand you better than ever, my dear."

"But how much do you really need?" she said tentatively.

"I don't know that I shall need anything," he said, starting to go. "Just taking precautions as any business man does. I'll arrange it in twenty minutes. At least, I happen to have *friends*."

She crumpled up under the stony contempt in his glance, angry and mortified at having so revealed herself and learned so little.

"I shall ask only one thing—don't mention my presence here."

"Yes, Alonzo," she said, looking down.

"Sorry to have given you any alarm when you have so much to worry about," he said, acidly, and went out. A moment later from the hall she heard him laugh aloud.

Chapter IV

While these scenes were taking place, a large limousine of fashionable make drove up to the private entrance of Mrs. Kilblaine, who since the death of her husband two years previously had occupied an adjoining house connected with her father's home. A man in the early forties sprang out, signalled the chauffeur to wait and clearing the steps with a nervous, alert energy, rang the bell.

"Mrs. Kilblaine at home?" he said, when the door had opened.

"Is she expecting you, sir?"

"Take my card and let her judge of that," said the visitor peremptorily.

The footman, glancing at it, read, "Mr. Daniel Haggerty."

Even in the circumscribed world of his comprehension the name was a passport. He bowed respectfully and adapting his tone to the exigency, said, "If you will wait here, sir, I'll inform Mrs. Kilblaine."

"Go ahead, go ahead!" said the visitor, waving him off as he approached to relieve him of his coat. "Take my message. I'm in a hurry."

He shed his coat, flung it over a chair, glanced at his watch and began to pace the floor.

"Mrs. Kilblaine will receive you," said the footman, returning.

When he had been ushered into Mrs. Kilblaine's private apartments, he found her half reclining on a little couch by the great Italian fireplace in carved stone. She did not rise but waited with her head resting on her hand, watching him with a feline interest. When a woman for the first time receives a man in her private salon without rising, it is already an acknowledgment of an intimacy that has progressed beyond the necessity of outward formalities. She did not offer her hand and he for his part stood silently looking down at her.

Her eyes were a clear gray, well spaced and noticeable against the brown Latin complexion and the short dark waves of her hair well lifted above the slender neck, which, if it had a defect, was that it was almost too high and too slender. She was in black; lithe and indolently stretched, like a dark cat sunk against the heaped-up gold

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and red of the cushions. For a moment they waited, studying each other rather as antagonists than as friends, until, seeing that he had no intention of beginning, she said, without taking her eyes from his:

“What made you come?”

“The chance of finding you.”

“You have seen me a dozen times,” she said carelessly.

“I have dined, lunched, sat at your tea table. That is not what I mean — I wanted to see you.”

“Beyond a certain point your attentions are rather compromising, are n’t they?”

“You care about such things?” he said, looking at her in surprise.

“We are in New York,” she replied, with some evident reference to the past.

“Then why have you permitted me to come here?”

“To make you understand the futility of coming again.”

“Good,” he said with a grim smile. “So we are going to talk like human beings once more. Glad of it.” He took out a cigar. “Don’t mind? Thanks.” He went over to the fireplace, struck a match and watched her through the flame and the sudden cloud of smoke.

"May I be inquisitive? This interests me. This is you," he added, with a gesture to the room.

"Do such things interest you?" she asked slowly.

"There's a lot about me, Rita, you don't know," he said, with a quick look at her.

He turned and passed slowly about the room, pausing from time to time before some *objet d'art*, a tapestry, or a piece of furniture which caught his fancy. Taste was not a quality she had accorded him and she followed with a growing surprise his perception of the quality of the things which were as much a part of her as the dress she wore. If she acknowledged one vanity, it was her pride in the sureness and distinction of her taste. The little salon was of the purest Renaissance without one discordant intrusion of other periods, and as she had what few women have — a sense of proportion and harmony — she had avoided the connoisseur's proclivity to create a museum. It was the salon of a great lady of the 16th century, well balanced, uncrowded, generously spaced, and each object in it was worthy of perpetuation in a museum.

"Who did it?" he asked in his abrupt way. "Is it you? Or did some precious interior

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decorator — No," he broke off suddenly, answering his own question, "this is you. Only you could have done this."

She nodded, interested and a little pleased at his divination.

"It's the period I like," he said, continuing his examination. "The great period of them all. Can't abide your Louis XV and XVI, or your Sheraton or Heppelwhite either. Artificial."

"Why?"

"The real aristocrats were those who won their right by force; all the rest, all that came after them, were just comedians, prancing about with the manners of dancing masters. But the Renaissance, that was a different matter. Hello?" All at once, he perceived a magnificent pair of carved oak doors which led into the further salons. "Where did you get these?"

"I found them in Verona."

"From the Picci Palace. I thought so," he said, going to them and passing his hand over the sculptured panels.

"You know them?" she said, astonished.

"I missed getting them," he said. "I have the tapestried portières that went over them. I shall send them to you. What do you know about their history?"

"They represent The Flight into Egypt,—with the twelve apostles grouped," she began.

"No, no, — the history of the owners. You don't know the tradition? You've lived day by day before such records of history and never wondered what crimes and tragedies they have witnessed?" He bent down and then rose with an exclamation of satisfaction. "Examine this. There is the great scar plainly visible; see, it has carried away an arm of the Joseph. That, my dear modern lady, is where Bartolomeo Picci nailed the corpse of the lover of his wife with his dagger, where she might find it when she stole out one night to keep a rendezvous."

Mrs. Kilblaine rose quickly, and going to his side, examined the ancient wound.

"Who was she?"

"Francesca, one of the Cenci, and she had her revenge before the year was out. That and other things these doors have seen."

She went back to the canopy and with a swift undulating motion returned to her first languor.

"Great period," he continued, moving slowly towards her. "Great men and great women, strong, bold, contemptuous, when only the fittest could survive. You're surprised? My

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hobby. The trappings have gone but there's a lot of the old Renaissance in us to-day — in the world I fight in, at least."

She looked at his crude, square strength and the head that seemed to have been knocked out with the blows of a hammer, and nodded to herself.

"Yes, you are very much like some *condottiere* of the Middle Ages. Yes, a Colonna or a Sforza. What a pity! That's where you really belong."

"Time will tell," he said grimly. "As for you, you are of the Middle Ages too. We both are."

"I?" she said, raising her eyebrows.

"Yes, particularly you. Why? I'll tell you later." He relaxed, smiling down at her. "This is nice to have you just by myself. You've made me wait a long time for the opportunity. Did it on purpose, I suppose?"

"See that you don't abuse the privilege," she replied, but with an involuntary provocation which she felt the moment after and regretted.

"After all, you are quite feminine," he took up, laughing down at her. "You liked me because I did n't act as other men do and the first thing you ask of me is to be commonplace."

She acknowledged the hit with a smile.

"Little danger of your ever being that."

"I like the room. I'll have one like it some day. It fits you," he said, looking at her so intently that she was forced to avert her glance. "I understand you a little better now."

She rallied with a laugh.

"I thought you understood me so well."

"I do." He approached the canopy at the side of which was placed a high-backed chair. "I'll sit here," he said, and without waiting for her answer, he drew the chair a little closer.

"No. You are sometimes a little overpowering, close to." She met the rebellion in his eyes and shook her head. "Over there, please." She indicated a seat by the fireplace.

"And if I refuse?"

She shrugged her shoulders and then, taking up a little electric bell from the table at her side, rang it twice. In a moment a footman appeared.

"Tea?" she asked maliciously.

He shook his head.

"No tea, John — just at present."

"Why did you do that?"

"Over there, please."

He made a virtue of necessity, laughed and obeyed.

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"Rather a new battle ground for you, is n't it?" she said, enjoying his discomfiture.

"It's like the rest."

She shook her head.

"There you are wrong."

He flung himself back in his chair, crossed his legs and puffed at his cigar meditatively.

"Well?" she said finally, when his silence continued.

"I do understand you," he began, straightening up and leaning forward.

She shook her head slowly with the faintest suspicion of a smile, ironical, amused and ominous.

"I do understand you," he repeated insistently.

"My dear Dan, you know a good many things. You have n't the slightest knowledge of women. That is not quite true. There is a certain brutal perception in you that would keep you from being made a fool of by an adventuress. And that's rather remarkable for a man of your type. But you have n't the slightest knowledge of a woman brought up as I have been with my traditions and my prejudices."

"Yet I have held you in my arms," he said point-blank. "Not once, but many times."

She looked at him from under her eyelids, re-

flected, and then continued without any noticeable change of tone.

"That is a very dangerous thing to remind a woman of." And yet, thrown out of the orderly tenor of her thought, she stopped playing with a tassel of one of the many cushions by her side. "After all, that but proves my point. You understand certain things in me. Let's say —"

"Elemental things?" he suggested.

"If you wish to call it that. But the first impulse is so little a part of a woman. It's the background that counts, the second thought. A woman's vanity is stronger than her emotions; and her prejudices and traditions stronger still. It's the inhibitions which determine a woman's decisions — a woman like me. I thought when you saw me here in my home you would understand."

"You're the only woman I ever met I would n't be bored with — when I was n't making love to her."

She laughed.

"I believe I could return the compliment."

"In the first place you are quite devoid of morality," he said, continuing his own thought.

She met the assertion with a laugh.

"You'd like to believe so. It would make

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things so much easier. I quite understand your point of view. You are mistaken."

"What's your idea of morality?"

"Mine?" she said thoughtfully. "My self-respect, perhaps."

"That is n't bad," he admitted; "make it your pride and I'll agree with you."

"Very well, my pride," she said, with a little disdain.

"That defines your pride only," he took up quickly, "but it is n't morality. Morality is simply what keeps you from doing the things you really want to do. Now if you really wanted to do something, nothing would restrain you."

"You are hopelessly wrong," she said confidently. "If you really knew —"

"Oh, you have done things you did n't want to do because you had to," he replied, without yielding his point. "That's not what I mean. I am talking about where there is a choice. I am not mistaken. What you want to do, really want to do, will always be the thing to do."

"I see. And you!"

"I? Of course. I have one virtue — one that I am sure of. I am not a hypocrite. I think we understand each other very well."

"Go on," she said, relaxing into a more pro-

vocative attitude. "I find this quite amusing. What next?"

"In some ways you are — well — the most feminine woman I have ever met — as you are at present when you are making up your mind to tantalize me."

"Feminine or feline?" she asked, amused, but without changing the reclining provocation of her attitude.

"You are like a black panther just at present, the same coquetry and just as cruel," he answered with that point-blank admiration which pleases women because they perceive it is involuntary. "And yet — the real clue to you is something quite different."

"What is it?"

"The quality of instant decision — when, say, you're up against something that has to be met. When you asked me why I thought you medieval, too, I meant that. If you had to, if there was no way out, you would be quite capable of a crime."

"Now I am a criminal," she said, with a laugh that was a little forced.

"We're all more or less that in this medieval society. Well, that's what interested me in you."

"But are n't you a little afraid of me, then?"

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"Not me!"

"Do you know, you are cleverer than I thought," she said, after a moment's thought. "To a certain extent you are right. Ever since I was a child, I've had one rule of conduct, — what has to be done, shall be done!"

"And you have met each crisis instantly, as a man would meet the inevitable?"

"I can't remember shedding a tear since I was that high," she admitted. "If that's what you mean."

"I'm curious to know certain things in your life," he said, nodding.

"That's rather personal, even from you," she replied coldly, suddenly perceiving how far she had strayed from her original impersonality.

"Heavens, yes," he said impatiently. "Why not? We have gotten to that point, have n't we?"

"You go very fast."

He rose and stood with his back against the mantelpiece.

"To make you out, there is one thing I want to understand. In every life there is usually some one decisive act that is the key to the rest. Know that and you know all. Why did you marry Kilblaine?"

In the last moments she had hurriedly with-

drawn from the impulsive interest into which she had been betrayed by her surprise at his insight. In order to more securely intrench herself and recover her lost vantage, she had determined to return to her first assumption of tolerant amusement. So, instead of resenting the frank impertinence of his question, to his surprise she answered in a lighter tone:

"You see, Dan, what you call your knowledge of women is after all only skin deep. Your limitation is the limitation of all American men. You will sentimentalize us. I can imagine the romantic picture you have made of me! The truth is I married out of pure calculation."

"Indeed!"

"Vanity, nothing more. It was — a brilliant match — a very great fortune. I wanted the power it would give me. I wanted to do things regally. Despite what you may think, I am a hopeless realist in life. With my needs, and they are frightfully luxurious, and my ambitions, the man was simply the instrument. You see? That is rather frank, is n't it?"

"He was over sixty and you were a girl, young, ardent, sought after —" he said, looking at her steadily. "Five years of that."

"Six," she corrected solemnly. "Six years and three months."

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"But it was not moral," he said, brusquely.

"Now what do you mean by that?"

"Going against nature is what I mean," he replied, sustaining the sudden hostility of her look. He went to the fireplace and flung away his cigar. Before he could continue, the Italian doors swung open and Mrs. Chalfonte fluttered in, short, plump, pretty in a brittle china way.

"Rita, what the devil —" Then she stopped but without confusion. "Oh — did n't know I was breaking into a tête-à-tête."

"Mr. Haggerty," said Mrs. Kilblaine, straightening up slightly.

"Oh, yes."

She gave him a nod which was a model of impertinence and condescension and continued, oblivious of his presence:

"Who the devil invited the Dalgeeshes to the ball?"

"I really don't know. Why?" said Mrs. Kilblaine with a shrug of her shoulders.

"The worst climbers in New York," said Mrs. Chalfonte with ill humor. "They've been throwing themselves at our heads for years. If *we're* going to let down the bars to every one who happens to have a few millions, what's to become of society?"

"My dear Cora," said Mrs. Kilblaine, reach-

ing for a cigarette, "all this is not very interesting to Mr. Haggerty. Suppose we discuss family matters in the family."

"Oh, ex-cuse me," said the younger sister with malicious emphasis, and she proceeded to flutter out as she had entered, without further recognition of the guest.

"A light?"

"Thanks. I'm sorry Cora was so rude. She's still a spoiled child."

He had the good sense not to comment on the incident. Instead, he withdrew to the fireplace, waited a moment, and suddenly said,

"Of course, all that you said to me is nonsense. I've heard enough to know that if you brought yourself to marry Kilblaine, it was a bargain."

"I can't help what people say. The tradition has made me quite a heroic figure, I believe. I don't deserve it. I was thinking of myself also."

"So you've built your whole life around your pride," he said slowly.

"Pride?" she answered, appearing to reflect on what he had said. "Why not? It's a very good thing to build your code around — and it can't be destroyed by disillusionment as so many things can. My dear Dan, I'll take pity on

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you. I'll give you the clue. Besides, it can't help you in the least." She paused and then said slowly, with a careful emphasis, "Yes, in all things, it is a question of my pride. Whatever I've done or had to do, put it down to pride — pride of family if you will. If I still resist you, well, it's because I'm too proud to do what other women would do. There you have it."

"By George!" he exclaimed. "If you had n't that in you, I would n't be here. That's what got me the first time I looked into those gray eyes of yours."

"If you're going to make love to me —" she began, raising her hand in protest.

"I'm going to do nothing else," he said heedlessly. "I've done nothing else since I met you two months ago. There's never been a pretense of anything else. Come, from you, that's not honest. You've always known it, and you've let me go on seeing you on that basis."

She turned the conversation as she had done before, when to answer him would have been awkward.

"What a pity we're not out in Montana again — I mean, what a pity for you," she corrected with a laugh. "Dan, Dan, you really

are so out of place here! You ought to come dashing up on horseback and swoop me away."

"Well, whatever you are now, for one week I knew how to reach down into the woman inside of you," he said roughly. "Laugh all you want but you can't change that."

"I was interested," she said carelessly. "Why not? You were in your setting there, with your ranches and your mines and your mountains."

He rose and stood at her feet, looking down at her.

"Rita, you are saying one thing and thinking another. A week like that can't be forgotten."

For a moment she yielded to her revery.

"I don't wish to. I shall always remember it," she replied dreamily. "It's one of those memories, well — that makes it easier to meet the future. I was carried away. I admit it. I suppose it was a touch of the romantic that we all believe in — as we all have our superstitions. The effect of the movies on society perhaps," she added, trying to escape from the dangerous seriousness into which she had wandered. But when she raised her eyes to his, she found his gaze so serious, so penetrating and so compelling that, abandoning her tone of banter, she said

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quite simply, "Why do you want to spoil what was? I've withdrawn, Dan, to my background — and you won't understand."

"Why do you go on seeing me?"

"Heavens, how you put questions to me!" she said, to gain time. "You're a dreadful cross-examiner. Why do I go on seeing you? For many reasons. A man like you is a challenge to my sex. Besides, now I have you on my own battle ground. It's a little my revenge for what happened out there in Montana. I am quite safe here. This is a game I can always beat you at. You see, I can impose my conditions. I can say thus far and no farther." She took up the little bell from the table and looked at him with a malicious smile. "Tea?" Then throwing it down again, she leaned back smiling, "Also it amuses me to see the great Dan Haggerty, the dangerous, ruthless, lawless Dan Haggerty, the terror of men, who can juggle railroads, mines, corporations, like so many pretty balls, helpless and shorn of all his terrors once he blunders into a drawing-room."

"All that is your side of the game," he replied with real or assumed indifference. "What other reasons?"

"Well, to clear the air," she said, in a matter-of-fact tone. "To define your intentions."

His face for the first time showed genuine surprise.

"Have you any doubts?"

"My dear Dan," she said with a frown, "you are married."

"You knew it from the first," he countered, allowing his impatience to appear. "If you had a right to that week in Montana, I have the right to the rest."

"Dan, Dan, you pretend to know women," she said, covering her confusion with a laugh. "And you would have me logical!"

"Heaven forbid. I simply was justifying myself."

"Oh, I know all you will say," she began rapidly. "You are married only in name, a mockery, a wife who has been in a sanatorium for ten years. But since we have come to personalities, as you say, what of your wife? Are you planning a divorce?"

"A divorce?" he said, astounded.

"Why, yes, a divorce!" she insisted, frowning. "I think I have a right to ask that."

"I see."

He drew forth another cigar and lit it, still looking at her.

"No," he said slowly, "I shall do no such thing."

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She affected surprise.

"What! You still have scruples — that does surprise me. Religious scruples?"

"That and my own particular brand of pride," he said abruptly. "Loyalty, that's all. Try to understand me." He put the cigar back in his pocket and began to walk up and down. "Enemies are nothing to me — I forget them to-morrow. But there's one thing I never forget — a friend. I have never yet gone back on a friend." He flung himself in his chair, locked his hands and continued, with a certain harshness, "Rita, when I was eighteen, a dock hand along the Cleveland wharves, the girl I was engaged to, a waitress in a sailors' restaurant, loaned me the two hundred dollars that gave me my start. That is a debt of honor. She was the partner of my hard times, the first who stuck to me and believed in me. She bore my name when it meant nothing. She's going to keep that name now, so long as she lives, no matter what the conditions. I made my decision ten years ago to keep the faith. Not even to have you — the one thing I want more than anything else in this world — you, the woman I love in my knowledge and success, am I going to throw over the woman of my hard days. Between us that's final!" He struck the arm

of his chair with his fist and sprang up. "You've got your pride — this is mine. If there's one thing I loathe and despise, it's a certain type of man who throws over the prop he's leaned upon, the moment he's arrived. A man who does that is just a common, ordinary cur!"

Nothing so convinces a woman as the revelation of some moral superiority in a man. Suddenly, in this play of wits, in this surface conflict which she had directed adroitly away from dangerous depths, she felt a real thrill. She looked up at him with a sudden respect.

"I like you a hundred times better for saying that," she said, stretching out her hand impulsively towards him.

In his pacing about the room he had come near her. He caught her hand in its gesture and held it in his enveloping grip. The possessive contact broke her yielding mood.

"Please."

He continued to retain her hand, trembling a little.

"Very well —"

She possessed herself again of the little electric bell and looked at him warningly.

"For God's sake, don't ring that!" he cried, with such an explosion of boyish wrath that she could not restrain her laughter.

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For a moment they waited while he returned to the fireplace and faced about, then she said quietly, determined to turn the conversation to the explanations she had decided upon in advance, "Dan, you've given me something I did n't have for you before — respect. But after all, your decision rather defines the situation, does n't it?"

"Neither you or I can be held by convention," he said impatiently, "if you love me."

"Then I don't love you enough!"

"Some day you'll know yourself."

"That's exactly one thing I do know — myself; the danger of my temperament and my weaknesses," she said, shrugging her shoulders. "And so any day I may make up my mind," She stopped and looked at him to give full emphasis to her words, "to announce my engagement to —"

"To Captain Daingerfield?" he said quickly.

"You are quicker than I thought."

"Then, Rita," he said, seeking her eyes, "that means only one thing. You must be afraid of loving me."

"Oh, I don't know," she said, looking away from him. "But after all, suppose that were true. What then?"

"You won't do that!" he cried out angrily.

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"A first time, perhaps! Not twice. You know now what that means. No, you can't do that. Rita, nature drives us blindly and it drives us terribly, — when we are young! We think we are gloriously free to choose and we've only been moved about like puppets. When experience, bitter experience, comes, we wake up and find that nature, not ourselves, has made the choice for us. That is the tragedy of life. Don't you know that it's only when we have looked on life steadily and long that we become capable of knowing what we really need?"

"And then it is too late," she said rebelliously.

"Not for you and me! What stops you? Respectability? No. You've had your experience with respectability! Come, you are not held by catch phrases. We live in a world where we make our own laws, you and I. We are made for each other; you for me, I for you. You know it. You admitted it once."

"If you were free," she began, yielding to the compelling quality of his voice, "but you are not free."

He drew a chair nearer to her, yet not so near as to offend against her orders, and, leaning forward eagerly, said:

"Look here, all my life I have lived in myself,

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by myself. I have never given my confidence to man or woman. I've stood alone. The things I've dreamed of, I've dreamed to myself. I've fought alone, the sort of a fight you can't even guess at. I've fought my way out of the depths of poverty; fought up with every man against me, against lies, treachery, crimes. I've fought as men fought me, ruthlessly, lawlessly, ruining those who tried to ruin me. That's over. Yet if I died to-day, I should be only a great criminal. Where the world sees a great achievement, Rita, I've only just begun. Now I'm going to create. Do you know what you could mean to me? You are the first woman into whose eyes I ever looked and recognized an equal. You're going to know me as I really am, share every thought, dream as I dream, watch my battles, and when I win I'm coming to you. There's something of the boy in the heart of an American, something that rebels against loneliness, against the pretence of infallibility we wear to the world; something of the boy who wants to enjoy his success, to laugh over it, to be flattered. I want you, to spur me on to make the game worth playing. But beyond all that, I want the love of an equal — a woman that is all woman, who clings to me, who takes everything and gives everything."

She closed her eyes and her breast rose in a long deep breath, and seeing how he had moved her, he had the wit to rise and retire again to the fireplace.

"Do you really think," she said at last, with an effort, "that I would ever come to you on any other basis than as your wife?"

"Morality again?"

"Something stronger than that!" She sat up with a sudden return of her resolution. "Just what you've seen in me, Dan — pride."

"In the end that won't hold you back," he insisted obstinately.

Perhaps a little sense of how the honors of the interview had gone to him impelled her to shift the conversation into a new field.

"Dan," she took up after a moment, "you are not easily warned, because you are headstrong and because you have won almost everything you've wanted, yet I'm going to warn you, in all fairness, and a last time. If you can't see it — on your own head be it." She waited and then adopted a note of candor which she sustained through the rest of their conversation. "In a certain sense, you are right. I am non-moral; I like the word better than unmoral. I have been non-moral, I admit, in going on and seeing you. I'll tell you why."

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"You are going to tell me of your marriage," said Haggerty.

"Yes, of my marriage." She gave a little inflection of repugnance to the word. "I married, a girl of twenty, an old man, a man of sixty-five, who had bought everything in life he had set his fancy on as he bought me, — a worn-out, cynical, pitiless libertine. Why? Because family pride is the strongest thing in me. If I had not sold myself, — you see I don't avoid the word *sold* myself —"

"But in perfect respectability!"

"In perfect respectability, naturally — we should have been living in a boarding house, instead of here. Now the Majendie name can go on as it has stood for seven generations — at the top."

"Would you do it over again?"

She frowned, drew a long breath and looked up at him.

"Yes. It would be harder, but I would. Dan Haggerty, I lived through those six years." She waited a moment until she could control herself and then continued rapidly, "I paid the price — but in the end my pride survived as I survived. What I went through —" She flung out her hands in a gesture of emptiness. "No, that is a curtain that I cannot draw for

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any one. When a woman has to go through what I have gone through, there is only one way she can do it. She must tear out her heart and throw it away. And what 's been torn out can't be put back. No, wait, let me go on. At the bottom, in the last analysis, there is absolutely no power of feeling left in me. Does that surprise you? Half the women I know have come to that. When you play the game with me, you are playing against marked cards. I don't live; I simply look on life, if you can understand the distinction. Why? Because circumstances forced me to sacrifice my youth and my illusions and I suffered bitterly. Now I have the right to revenge myself on life! Do you blame me?" She looked at him but he did not answer. "Men interest me, yes, but not as men. If they seek me out, if once I see in their eyes that look of possession, everything in me revolts. Do you wonder? I am without the slightest compunction or pity. Be my friend, but don't seek to have me. I have done more for you than for any other man. I have warned you. My dear Dan, believe me, the only sensation I am capable of is the sensation of combat, the fictitious, feverish excitement of a duel, which I am certain to win, and that sensation ends when I have won. That is why, Dan Haggerty, you will

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never have me for your mistress. Now you are warned!"

"Thanks for the warning," he said undismayed, "but you are not entirely honest."

"I have been surprised at my honesty," she replied, relaxing into a lighter tone.

"No, when a woman announces that she is going to be honest, she is only preparing to deceive herself," he said meditatively, "And don't think I don't see through your game, my little duelist. You are too shrewd a judge of men not to know that danger never once turned me back. Just what your object is I don't know. It does n't matter. You may believe what you say or you may be amusing yourself at my expense. No matter. I rather imagine that you like to play with wild animals."

She smiled and looked at him with that side-long glance with which such women most intently study a man.

"Perhaps."

"I, too, little black panther," he said grimly. "All this does n't frighten me in the least. We are nothing in ourselves. We only act as we react to others. What you are to me has nothing to do with what you were before. Each time we love we create a new self in us. You will know that self when you know love and surrender."

"So it is a duel?" she said lightly and a little excitement lit up her eyes.

"It's been that from the first," he answered brusquely. "You should have warned me then. Now it's too late. I'm not the sort of man you can play with. Besides, I am quite certain no one would be more disappointed than you if I did take your warning — your clever but quite insincere warning."

"Quite true," she said, with a mischievous nod. "But now my conscience is clear. All is fair in love and war. I shall rather enjoy it. Perhaps, as you say, I am not altogether honest. It is rather exciting opposing you, for you are unusually — well — thrilling."

He rose to go and stood meeting the malice of her smile with a smile that was ironical and confident.

"All is fair, then, in love and war?"

"All."

He took a step toward her without thinking. Instantly, without moving from her reclining pose, she raised a warning finger.

"Back — or I ring."

Then, as he stood frowning and chafing against the invisible prohibition of her mood, she added, delighted at his irritation,

"Dan, Dan, I shall beat you every time."

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Here, my dear *condottiere*, you are helpless as a child." She took up the little bell and held it threateningly towards him. "You are on my territory, and here women have imposed the rules. We have refined on the stiletto. We have this and it is quite as dangerous, believe me." With the bell still held in her right hand she extended to him the left, saying, "So we remain antagonists — but with our cards on the table?"

He took her hand and without quite concealing his irritation said roughly, "But I have held you in my arms!"

Instantly she rang, withdrawing her hand.

"Tea for one," she said, when the footman had appeared.

Chapter V

Mrs. Kilblaine, when Haggerty had departed, remained a long time in indolent meditation. A little Sealyham terrier, her favorite, came romping in with the advent of tea and sought to attract her attention. She affected not to notice him, until, furious at her indifference, he caught her fingers playfully in his teeth. Then, taking up a lump of sugar, she amused herself by tantalizing him until, having enjoyed his irritation sufficiently, she flung him the lump and said sharply, "Enough! Lie down!"

Her mood was to return over the progress of the interview, to consider a little more carefully the possibilities of the new situation created and to put to herself with candor the questions Haggerty had aroused in her imagination—questions which she had adroitly evaded. Haggerty interested her—more than any man she had ever met. She acknowledged it frankly to herself, but was it only as a challenge or something that had reached down deeper, into depths which

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she no longer credited? She had the feeling that he understood her astonishingly well — despite her denials. He had not been her dupe and for that she was grateful to him. From now on every art and every intuition would have to be brought into play if she were to hold her own against him. He loved her and this knowledge was pleasing to her. She had no doubt on that score. Having no false modesty, she knew her worth. And there had been times when she had come perilously near to being swept off her feet by his impetuous wooing. He was a force, a force not easily to be played with, a force with always a threat of danger. She smiled at certain recollections. On the whole the honors had been hers. Underneath all his surface restraint, she divined how he must have fretted and fumed to have been held so near and yet so far. Despite all his audacity, his clear-eyed piercing through her not entirely sincere revelation, despite his contempt of conventions and his obstinate tearing aside of trivialities, she had balked and baffled him. She had forced him to her terms, brought him to understand that, even admitted to her intimacy, the rules and regulations lay always in her hands. If it were no more, it was exciting and her triumph decidedly thrilling. It was something to be

the one woman who could hold and yet resist such a man.

She rose at last, with still a little inward smile of satisfaction, and was proceeding towards her bedroom when, to her astonishment, the door opened and her father entered, hat in hand.

“Daddy!”

“I’ve only a moment, but I had to see you,” he said gravely.

She ran to him and took him in her arms impulsively. When she had told Haggerty that she was incapable of feeling, she had told only half the truth. Her father was the one love of her life. From childhood they had been like lovers and all the adoration that he lavished on her she returned impetuously. He was her ideal. She was proud of his aristocratic manners, his distinction, the quality of race that he wore like an epaulette. She admired him unreservedly. She had, she knew, no rival in his heart. She had stood at his side, proud as he was proud, determined to carry on the banner of the family, sacrificing her young life willingly for him, ready always to sympathize with him, console him or fight his battles, as might be. Between the two, in the solidarity of their affection, every thought was divined before it was uttered.

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"You are in trouble? In danger?" she cried, holding him in her arms and looking into his clouded face. "Daddy dear, tell me all."

"In trouble, yes," he replied, without equivocation. "In danger? I think not. I can't tell for an hour or so."

"You were to be away a week. What has happened?"

"I have been attacked in my absence, Rita dear," he said nervously. "There has been, I fear, treachery."

"It is serious?"

"I think yes," he said slowly. "I shall know as soon as I see Christiansen. I am going to him now."

She put her hand on his shoulder.

"Whatever happens, Daddy, we shall always meet it; we always have. Remember that."

"It is n't as serious as that," he said, with an appearance of courage which did not entirely convince her. "There are two things to do now. First, to find out what has happened. Second, to meet the issue."

"When will you have to meet what you call the issue?" she asked anxiously.

"To-morrow — by ten o'clock."

"At the opening of the stock exchange?"

"Yes."

"Had n't you better tell me all?" she said, with a sudden chill in her back.

"Time is precious. It's a long story, — when I come back."

"You have been speculating — again? Oh, Daddy!"

He nodded.

"I had to," he said abruptly. "Don't keep me, dear. I have a lot to do and do quickly. After all, in two hours it may have all blown over. This is only to prepare you."

"Who has done it?"

"A friend and an enemy."

"What friend?"

"That I must find out, at once — a syndicate operation — some one has sold us out."

"And the enemy?"

"The man who has cornered International Motors."

"Not —"

"Dan Haggerty; yes."

She received the information stupidly, utterly unprepared.

"I'm afraid," she said desperately. "I don't understand. You said —"

"Your friend Haggerty."

"Then you are caught in the corner?"

"Yes."

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For a moment, in the panic of this revelation, she strove to concentrate all her forces on the immediate danger.

"Daddy, answer me. You must. Is there any real danger? You know what I mean."

"Not if I have any friends left in the world!" he said, but in his eyes was the furtive gleam of a growing fear.

"You must go at once," she cried out. "When you know how things stand, come to me, I shall be waiting." She enveloped him in her arms. "Courage. I am here. Now hurry!"

When he had left, she remained stock-still, incapable of motion, listening, as though in the hollowness of her brain she could hear the rising storm of her own panicky thoughts.

"It is worse than he will admit," she said, almost aloud. "Haggerty! Good God!"

Now, left to herself and the consideration of her own peril, the true significance of the revelation burst over her. She foresaw possibilities that rose up before her in terrifying distinctness; possibilities that made a mockery of the triumph she had but a moment before enjoyed with such thrilled delight. Haggerty, then! The worst was she did not know, she could not know, until her father returned. What was it she would have to meet?

"Come," she said to herself, with a sudden anger at her weakness. "It is a moment to act. I must be ready — ready for anything."

She went deliberately to the telephone and gave a number.

"I wish to speak to Mr. Haggerty," she began, and the quiet firmness of her voice surprised her. But immediately a terrible thought assailed her. "Heavens, if he should not be there!"

The next moment his voice answered her.

"Yes, it is I, Mrs. Kilblaine," she said coldly, herself once more, and, omitting explanation and subterfuge, she continued, "I want to see you to-night. Could you dine here?"

"Impossible."

"Can you come here afterwards?"

"Very difficult."

"*I* am asking it. It is necessary."

He hesitated a moment.

"Come at nine o'clock, no matter what excuses you have to make," she said imperiously, "if it is only for ten minutes."

"I am trying to see how I could arrange it," she heard him say, as though to himself.

"Well?"

"At nine o'clock. I'll be there," he said, finally.

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“Thank you.”

She hung up the receiver and glanced at the clock. Two and a half hours to wait!

Chapter VI

Two hours and a half to wait! Her first movement was one of incredulity. It seemed to her that she was going through an experience that had already been lived through and that the present was some phantasmagoria of her brain, a trick of the memory. It was not possible that the great crises of life could be repeated! Such things did n't happen!

"I am letting my imagination run away with me," she said to herself impatiently. "What if he is caught in the corner? Even if he loses a million — two million? We can weather it, — Cora and Mother and I. It'll be a hard moment, but it is n't disaster. Besides, with his position and his friends — if necessary, I shall go to Gunther personally. Come, there is no use of getting into a panic. I am acting like a child!"

She rang and ordered a fire to be lighted and drew a chair before it.

"It's quite chilly to-night," she thought,

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without realizing why her hands had grown cold and clammy. She glanced at the clock. It had hardly moved.

"Am I trying to deceive myself, I wonder?" she said, holding out her hands to the flame. "Let me think."

If there were no danger, why had her father come to her with such a warning? It was not his way — no, not at all like him. Her fears returned, assumed vast, indeterminate proportions, like lengthening shadows. Beneath her reasoning lay her woman's intuitions and about her, over her, blocking all escape, was something vague and ominous — the shadow of Haggerty. What exactly did that portend? Haggerty? Was her fate in his hands? Did he know? Was it planned, deliberately planned? At first she rejected the idea. But her mind continually reverted to it. Had he played this game, this game of millions, just for her? He was capable of it; there was a certain audacity and magnitude about such a thought that appalled her and yet left her with a little excited thrill; her vanity aroused. She would beat him, even at his own game, with his own weapons, — somehow! But if she did n't?

She remained a long while motionless, staring into the flames, feeling at once curiously caught

up in the whirligig of time, transported back over intervening years, flung once more against a situation that had been met, resurrected now out of the buried past.

"Well, if I've done it once, I can do it again," she said, but as the resolution came into her mind, her whole body shook with a quick, nervous repulsion.

At this moment the door opened and her little nephew Rodney Majendie came scampering in for his privileged half-hour. He was a boy of seven, straight as an Indian and almost as dark; graceful, clean-cut; a true Majendie.

He came in eagerly, story-book in hand, and for a moment she strove to concentrate her disordered thoughts upon "The Swiss Family Robinson." But the effort proving too great, she put down the book and said:

"Aunt Rita has a bad headache. She'll have to beg off to-night."

"Not just one little chapter?" he pleaded mournfully.

"No, not to-night. Come here."

She held him before her, looking so strangely and so steadily into the eyes that were the eyes of the father and the grandfather, the eyes that held the future of the Majendie name, that he began to squirm uneasily.

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"I wonder if he'll be worthy of it?" she said to herself, thinking of all that might lie ahead for her to do. Then she held him a moment closely in her arms, kissed him and sent him away.

His father had died six years before, and she had never quite recovered from the rebellion and the shock. They had grown up together — only a year apart — rode, hunted, fished as two chums. In her brother, with all his magnetism and charm, there had been a certain weakness that was not in her nature. His marriage had been a *mésalliance*. She had fought against it to the last and then, suddenly accepting the fact, had striven to avert the tragedy she foresaw. A year later, ill-mated and disillusioned, her brother had seized the opportunity of the breaking out of the war to seek his freedom in the Lafayette Squadron. Six months later he lay dead and unclaimed in No Man's Land.

All the pride and devotion of father and daughter were now concentrated on the little Rodney, the last to bear the name. They had bought him from his mother, who had driven a hard bargain, returning hatred for hatred, forcing them to humble themselves before she gave her consent to the agreement she cove-

tously desired. At any rate that was over: he at least would be brought up in the old Majendie house and taught the code of *noblesse oblige*.

It was characteristic of her relations with her father that never once did either refer to the tragedy, each too proud to disclose the extent of his sorrow, guarding it as something too sacred even to be shared. In all the decisions she had been forced to make she had always kept this privacy; even her brother had never known the reasons which had determined her own marriage.

In each generation of Majendies there had always been one who had led the rest, sometimes a man, more often a woman, who repaired the errors, enforced the sacrifices, guided the destinies of the family — one leader so acknowledged because in him or in her was the capacity for absolute and unquestioning sacrifice. That strain had been clear in her from early childhood — a childhood marked by an excess of pride that often, before a woman's tact had taught her to conceal it, showed itself in an arrogance that left her few friends among her own sex. It is only necessary to repeat here one incident to indicate this attitude of mind, which indeed was characteristic of her whole life.

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When Rita was but thirteen years of age, she was invited to luncheon at the home of a school-mate, Aloise Gunther, who a little too ostentatiously paraded her guest through the newly acquired magnificence, cataloging the price of each treasure ravished from European traditions. The little Rita listened with a smile of superior disdain until the inspection had ended in the great gallery of portraits of English and Italian aristocrats. Then she said:

“Now you must come to-morrow and see our house.”

And the next day, conducting her guest into the great dining room, where are hung the family portraits — her father by Sargent, her grandfather by Gilbert Stuart and the great-uncles of the Spanish branch by Goya — she was heard to remark:

“And these are the portraits of our *own* ancestors.”

A little too contemptuous of feminine moods and pettiness, she made her friends among the chums of her brother, Dick Daingerfield, Tom Larabee, Larry West, — playing their games, sharing their fatigues, matching their skill. One passion she had, of her own sex, the love of gardens and the green soil and the great oaks on the Newport estate which Commodore Ma-

jendie of Revolutionary fame had set out. Each tree was to her an heirloom and a link with the past, and, with an almost oriental quality of ancestry worship, she defended them against the vagaries of modern landscape architects.

The tragedy of her brother brought her still closer to her father with an instinct to protect him, comprehending his loneliness, his weakness and his need of a stronger will to fall back upon. With youthful precocity, she divined the vacuum which separated her parents and judged them through prejudiced eyes, laying all the blame on the shoulders of the mother. Yet, characteristically, no open word of criticism passed her lips, often as she rebelled at the undignified actions of a woman who still played at youth and surrounded herself with companions befitting the age of her children. This she tolerated with a little disdain. She knew her mother without illusions and her satisfied need of the appearance of evil. What she could not forgive was the quality of weakness that was in her, that could be content with this trifling at life. She felt that her mother was "bad form" and to her this was the unpardonable offence.

When she was introduced into society at the

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age of eighteen, her birth, her fortune and her charm naturally drew about her a host of suitors. In her own mind, she had planned, as she did all things, deliberately, to marry at the age of twenty-five. Her attitude towards men was a curious one. She sought their company by preference, quickly attracted to friendships, yet fiercely resenting the slightest overstepping of the limits. The quality of surrender inherent in the first love of a young girl was something repulsive to her sense of freedom. The moment that a man approached her with the eyes of a lover, it seemed to her that he was seeking to subdue something in her and her instincts rose up in combat. Perhaps if she had been less sought after, her inclinations might have been different, but the daily pursuit of her by men genuinely — or for a motive — infatuated with her, kept her in this *intransigent* attitude of mind. If she still had contemplated marriage it was because she hated old maids.

In the full flush of this adulation, confident in her privileged power to direct the future, she suddenly was confronted by the specter of the family ruin.

The Majendies (the name had been “de Majorendi”) had come to America from Spain

by way of Holland in pre-Revolutionary times. One branch had remained in the South, the other had emigrated to the colony of New Amsterdam and settled among the great landed patroons along the upper river. Until the middle of the eighteenth century, the family fortunes had reposed upon their holdings in real estate and certain banking ventures. In 1850, at the death of Commodore Majendie, six children were left to divide the estate and the new generation, faced with the competition of new financial forces, began to abandon its attitude of aloofness. Carlos Majendie had formed a connection with one of the older banking institutions of the city; but his interest was not so much an active one as a policy of larger returns for his investments. His son, Alonzo, however, confronted with certain financial curtailments, had completely abandoned the traditional continental antagonism towards business, and thrown himself whole-heartedly into the career of making money, induced perhaps by the desire to meet the rising scale of wealth of the great industrial families, preferring to profit by a privileged financial outlook rather than to resort to judicious family alliances.

Never more than a fortunate lieutenant, utilized by stronger and more audacious men for

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personal and social reasons, he committed the mistake of believing that he was what he appeared to be. So long as he had been content to follow, his fortune had risen in steady accretion. Where Gunther or Forschein or Slade made a million, he duly received his hundred thousand. Too close familiarity with the ease of the financing operations that signalized this period of expansion led him into the gambler's fatal quality of risking all on a great coup, — and the strain of the gambler was strong from the days of his Spanish ancestors. He ventured for himself at a moment when the sky seemed innocent of the slightest suspicion of storm. Initial success led him to double his risks in order to double the profit that was at his finger tips. At this moment, from the depths of that great ocean of unrest and uncertainty, the imagination of a people, a tidal wave of suspicion reared itself, and in a week every paper profit was swept away until he found himself desperately facing total annihilation.

It was this crisis which confronted Rita Majendie, when without hesitation or outward display of emotion, she had married Silas Kilblaine.

Kilblaine had come to America as a stow-away in the early fifties, worked his way out

west and "hit it rich," as the expression goes, in the early exploitation of the silver and copper fields that produced the aristocracy of the pick and shovel. A multi-millionaire at forty-five, he turned all his savage energies into the riotous and pagan enjoyment of life. Tolerated and feared for his great wealth, a passionate lover of horse racing, a gambler who won or lost a hundred thousand at a sitting of poker — the one game that could satisfy the appetites of these early buccaneers — his attitude towards women was that of a Turk. Twice married and twice divorced, it suited his grim instincts to carry off the prize that others coveted. He did not love Miss Majendie and he knew that the woman he bought hated him with a dumb, concentrated fury. Perhaps nothing else could have revived a flame in the gray, worn ashes of his passions. He had no friends and he wanted no friends. He had the profoundest contempt of the society which accepted him only because it feared him. In such a man, libertine and tyrant, the only emotion left to old age is the enjoyment of inflicting pain.

He married Rita Majendie, with his thumb to his nose, as a last insulting gesture to society. She was a figurehead he needed to dress his table and to adorn his box at the opera, and he

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delighted in humbling and breaking the spirit of the proud woman who had coldly and deliberately made the bargain to continue a brood of aristocrats. A year after their marriage, to the public and secret humiliation to which he subjected her, he added the spectacle of open infidelities. She could have procured a divorce a dozen times over, but she refused. To her, divorce was a confession of failure. To his attitude of unrelenting persecution she opposed the set mask of inflexible pride. No word or look ever betrayed to the world the purgatory she endured. Yet as she had confessed to Haggerty, only her pride had survived this daily inquisition. What the sensitive, proud girl had to endure behind the secret doors that are closed to the world, only a woman can understand. When he died, she performed all the outward expressions of widowhood with ceremonious punctiliousness, facing the world with the same set and inscrutable smile, with the same lively and graceful exterior, from which she believed the animating spark had long since been extinguished.

When then, two years after the death of her husband, she met Haggerty, she believed two things had been exhausted in her, — the capacity for feeling and the capacity for suffer-

ing. Yet already time and the full abundance of her youth were working within her. If Haggerty had been simply a man of great strength, he would never have attracted her. But it was the idealist she perceived in him that first interested her; the discovery of the boy and the dreamer that gave him the longing to enjoy life and the need of creating greatly.

For the first time in the setting and the quality of the unexpected, romance appeared to her. Every woman holds in her imagination somewhere this belief in a waiting romance. That is it forbidden, transitory, to be paid for in after heartache, in no wise deters her. She herself creates it, rears it in her illusion and buries it in her memory as her birthright — a moment's halt in an oasis along the arid journey of life.

She had met Haggerty on a visit to the ranch of a friend in Montana, on a trip that had been suddenly and casually decided upon. She had met him by accident on a ride she had taken alone, yielding to a sudden desire for solitude. He had come upon her, riding over the hills, and they had made their own introductions, continuing together for hours, contrary to all her circumspect traditions. From the first moment their eyes had met, she knew that he

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would love her as no man had loved before, implacably, unrelenting, gentle and tempestuous, and for the first time she went eagerly forward not knowing whether she herself would love but knowing that consciously something in her was determined to be loved by this man. The world of the green solitudes and unrestricted stretches was not the world she had been brought up in and to it she would never return. But the very unreality of this existence made her moment of romance the more real.

That he was married he had told her at their first parting, directly, brusquely, in a way she could not fail to understand, and, looking into her eyes, he had added:

“Now I’ll ride here to-morrow afternoon and every afternoon while you stay.”

Day after day she had returned, in defiance of every tradition in her, reckless and eager. Once he had called formally at the camp and once they had ridden over to his ranch for dinner. But of the daily meetings no one knew. It was an inseparable part of her sentimental needs, — this quality of the clandestine and the forbidden.

She had no conscience in what she did. She did it deliberately, with a passionate cry in her heart that life owed her this much. But all at

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once she took fright — the play had become too real. For the first time, she seriously questioned whether she was not falling in love; there had been moments, when she had felt his arms around her; once when her horse had lurched against him and almost unseated her and again when, laughing, he had picked her up and forded a stream, when for a short dizzy interval she had been terrified at the sudden incomprehensible instinct of delirious surrender which had pervaded all her being.

In him many things appealed to her. She liked his hatred of shams, his frank and contemptuous acknowledgment of his ruthless pursuit of a purpose, his incapability of pettiness, his direct casting aside of subterfuges and the startling abruptness of his arriving at a point. Then there were other things that she recognized. It was not herself but her love he sought, wise in his forbearance, never making advances, but with a curious quality of drawing her towards him. When she had finally admitted to herself that, if he were free, such a man might easily dominate her, she realized that a crisis had come. The next day she had left without even a farewell, precipitately, in full flight.

She knew that he would not remain upon this termination. She awaited his arrival in New

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York in her own setting with a little apprehension, at first determined not to see him, fearing disillusionment and so inclined to defend the memory of her romance. Yet increasingly she was aware of a great curiosity in him, in his beginnings and his advancing progress. Many stories were repeated to her of his stormy days, of his legal battles with his enemies, of a State bought up and owned by him, of his ruthless crushing of opposition and his final emergence into the wider field of municipal traction and the amalgamation of great industries. His enemies did not spare him, yet none denied him the quality of loyalty to his friends.

At this moment Haggerty was just entering the hazardous field of New York finance, not as a suppliant, but knocking on the door imperiously, with the challenge of one who knows recognition is only to be enforced in joined battle. At first she had refused to see him, moved perhaps by the patrician's fastidious prejudice against the self-made man. They had met finally at a dinner, and she had been agreeably surprised at his bearing. He had made no attempt at imitation of social types nor ventured into the sophisticated small talk which made up her traditional world. But he had expressed what he had to say quietly, with authority, with the ease of

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one secure in the knowledge of his own worth. She saw that he attracted and interested. There was a quality of the future about him that impressed. When he spoke to her, he made no reference to intimate memories, greeting her as a casual acquaintance, nor attempting to signal her out by any special attention. After dinner when the men had returned, there had been a discussion continued from the smoking room between Haggerty and a member of an English mission; and he had spoken on international problems with knowledge, authority and a shrewd holding to his own point of view. There had been much laughter at his bluff common sense and his humorous turning of his opponent's arguments. What he said interested her. She was pleased with his success as though it were a little her own and when her car had come she left in a revery, vaguely disturbed.

He did not call and she comprehended finally that he would not make the first advance. Against her own judgment, wondering a little at her own motives, she had invited him to dinner. He came in the same attitude. He showed no resentment and no precipitation to advance beyond the limits of the strict formality in which she permitted him to meet her. Yet once or twice when, baffled by this ret-

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icence and studied reserve, she had looked into his eyes questioningly, she had seen in his glance a touch of amused irony that disconcerted her. She began to yield to moods, restless and dissatisfied, her curiosity dangerously provoked, unwilling to remain in the present state of things.

Little by little, without an explanation, insensibly, quite naturally, they drifted back to their former intimacy. She had permitted it; she had even wished it with a sense of unfinished combat, of an issue that had been avoided, confident in her own background, yet discontented, feeling that the advantages of position lay with him. She had promised herself never to see him otherwise than in a formal gathering and to avoid any possible concession to intimacy. Yet when he had called that afternoon, after a moment's hesitation, she had yielded eagerly, deceiving herself with the specious excuse that it was to provoke a complete explanation.

Chapter VII

She had been almost an hour motionless before the fire, submerged in her thoughts, when Mrs. Majendie came in, her arms full of the photographs which had interested DeWitt.

"You have come out very well," she said, approaching her daughter, "but then you always do. What do you think of mine?"

Rita roused herself and glanced at her mother.

"This is not why she has come," she thought.

"Has she perhaps a suspicion?"

"You look a little tired, my dear," said Mrs. Majendie critically.

"Yes, a beastly headache," Rita answered indifferently. "Let me see them."

"I'm suffering myself," said Mrs. Majendie heavily. In the intimacy of her family, she abandoned her youthful sprightliness for the indulgences of an invalid. "I've been pestered to death all day. This ball will be the death of me — photographers, reporters, invitations and then the question of decorations. I wish you

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would look over the scheme Harrison has submitted."

"I saw it and made several changes."

"Oh, you did!"

"Yes. They were necessary. By the way, Cora was in, complaining."

Mrs. Majendie exploded. At such a time, when she was rushed to death, her brain racked with details, when no one was any help, not even Mrs. Parlow, the housekeeper, or Miss Tibbits, her secretary, for Cora to make a scene about inviting the Dalgeeshes!

"Well, why did you invite them?" said Rita, continuing to examine the photographs. "You are always laughing at them."

"Why?" said Mrs. Majendie, who did not wish to disclose her real reason. "But every one invites the Dalgeeshes now!"

Rita shrugged her shoulders. She knew perfectly well why her mother had included in her prospective triumph the Dalgeeshes whose ball up to now had been quite the most ostentatious affair of the season. In society persons you don't like necessarily take a certain priority.

"By the way, I sha'n't go to the opera with you to-night," she said. "I'm not up to it."

"But then we're only four in the box!"

"No, I'll send Dick along with you," she

replied, referring to Captain Daingerfield, who was of the party. "The proofs are not bad."

"Do you like mine?"

"Rather well," she said indifferently. Such things were too trivial at this moment.

Mrs. Majendie lingered, seeking an opening.

"Is there anything you want to say to me?" said Rita, in her direct way.

"No, nothing." She turned as though to go. "By the way, your father's back."

"Yes, I know."

"He came in to see you?" said Mrs. Majendie anxiously.

"Yes, he dropped in for a moment."

"How did he seem to you?"

"Why, as usual," she answered carefully. "In a rush."

"Did he say anything to you?"

"About what?"

"About business matters, of course."

"Yes, there's nothing to worry about."

"You're not alarmed?"

"He has already talked to her," she thought uneasily, but resolved on discretion, she answered lightly. "Not the slightest! Why? Now don't agitate yourself over nothing, mother. You understand nothing of such things, anyway."

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"He acted so strangely," said Mrs. Majendie, persisting. "And you know ever since that dreadful panic, with the tendency that is in his veins — Rita, something is wrong. He *is* in trouble."

"What did he say to you?"

"Oh, nothing definite," said Mrs. Majendie evasively. "It was his manner and the way he looked."

"My dear mother, you are quite wrong," she replied with a calm she did not feel. "Father has his worries, naturally, like every one else in these times. But such things are only temporary. If necessary, we'll back him up, that's all."

The mother's eyes dropped. She knew what she had come to find out. Her husband had not communicated to her daughter her refusal to help.

"Then it is n't as serious as I feared," she thought.

"Well, I hope nothing will happen just now," she said aimlessly as she went out.

"What on earth made him go to her?" Rita thought anxiously, when her mother had departed. The more she considered the extraordinary quality of this move, the more her alarm increased. Only an extremely critical

situation could have impelled her father to such a humiliation or to apply for assistance in such a quarter. As the danger visualized itself, her self-possession increased. She abandoned the languid indecision of her former attitude, sprang up and began to pace the floor, turning over rapidly in her mind the expedients to which she could resort. That her father had directly applied to her mother for assistance and been refused, she did not know. For a moment she was on the point of calling in her mother and sister and taking common counsel. Then she rejected this idea, realizing what a wound to her father's pride she might deal him unnecessarily. After all, the only danger she could yet perceive was the corner in International Motors and why should that rouse in her such ominous presentiments?

But was that all? What else could there be lurking in the shadows, still indecipherable? She could not get Haggerty out of her mind. For the tenth time she went over their interview, and now all the gay assurance with which she had flung her challenge to him filled her with a growing dismay. She herself had called it a duel and had told him that they remained antagonists. She remembered the quiet irony in his eyes when she had delivered this ulti-

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matum. What cards did he hold? Gradually the suspicion grew in her, until it amounted to a conviction that he had engineered the coup for the sole purpose of humbling her pride, of forcing her to come to him as a suppliant.

"Never!" she said to herself in a fierce revolt. "Half my fortune, if necessary, but he shall never have that satisfaction."

All the attraction that she had felt an hour before vanished. He appeared suddenly before her as nothing but the brute masculine force, seeking to subdue and imprison her to his inclinations. She did not stop to consider her own responsibility in awakening this ruthless desire. Her logic was submerged in her instincts. Everything in her resented and strove against such an antagonist, as though the grip of his great arms already held her in their vice.

"Never!" she repeated to herself in cold anger. "I shall never ask him a favor. There must be some other way out."

She thought of Captain Daingerfield, went to the telephone and asked him to come in early. Then she began to dress.

Chapter VIII

Though she had her own establishment, she was to dine that night at her father's. She took more than ordinary pains with her toilette. Twice Augustine her maid had to recommence her coiffure before she earned a staccato word of commendation. She chose, after much deliberation, the wine-colored dress extremely décolleté which she had worn at the opening of the opera, and discarding the rope of pearls she habitually wore, she put on the necklace of rubies in old-fashioned settings, which had been her wedding present from her husband. A diamond arrow shot across the black undulation of her hair slightly to one side; another brooch formed of a single diamond caught up the rich Venetian velvet fold which hung from one shoulder loosely, in generous drapery and gave her the airy, erect grace, a little *farouche* of her, whom laughingly she was accustomed to call her patron saint, — Diana the disdainful. She considered herself a moment in the long cheval glass of her boudoir, which was like a

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jewel case in itself, and then shed her rings, retaining only the pigeon-blood ruby which harmonized with her costume. Then, satisfied, she descended to the room in which she had received Haggerty and passing through the Picci doors entered the salon of her father.

All her *sang froid* had returned, for on reviewing the incidents of the interview with her father, she was prepared for the worst. Face to face with a crisis which could not be avoided, all indecision vanished. When she traversed the luxurious rooms enriched with the heirlooms of generations of Majendies, thought out and garnished by her own taste, when she beheld the liveried footmen moving in the dining room through the dazzling glow of massive plate and fine linen, she said to herself, with a sudden rebellious anger at the persisting fates which again threatened her:

“Never! Not an inch will I yield!”

Her first action was to ring for Phillips, who came in with such evident alarm in his manner that she said to him directly:

“Phillips, I know I can count on your discretion. Don’t ask any questions and don’t talk — do you understand?”

The only family butler, who had seen her grow from childhood to a woman, stiffened at once.

"You may count on me, Miss Rita."

"The instant my father comes in, notify me!"

"Yes, madam."

"Better not announce it, — a look will be sufficient."

"I understand, madam."

"Understand, Phillips, there must be no slip-up. He must not leave again before I see him."

"Very well, madam, I shall attend to it. You can trust me, Miss Rita."

"I know I can. That's all. Is Captain Daingerfield here yet?"

"Just arrived, madam."

She went in to meet him.

Of all the men she had known, the one who had been closest to her was her brother's old friend, Dick Daingerfield. He had adored her blindly and slavishly from their childhood days. She had rejected him twenty times, good-humoredly, carelessly, peremptorily, impatiently, at times with a certain unreasoning display of cruelty. Yet in her secret mind, even as a young girl, she had often said to herself:

"In the end this is the man I shall marry."

She did not love him. He had never for a

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moment stirred her imagination or disturbed the rhythm of her control, as Haggerty had disorganized her at the first exchange of their glances. In settling upon Daingerfield as a future husband, she had frankly admitted that she would probably never love him as in her inexperience she conceived love to be. On the other hand, she knew him with a sense of complete exploitation and confidence. There would be no surprises, but then there would be no disillusionments. She felt at ease in his company. She had grown accustomed to him almost as though they had been married ten years. There was something comfortable about him. He fitted into her life. She would direct him. He was not brilliant. His mind was set along distinctly obvious and simple lines, but he was well set-up, sufficiently good-looking, of a clean-cut, rangy, English type and out-of-door charm, neither dissolute nor affecting a weariness towards life. Then he would never demand more of her than she would be willing to give. Her marriage to Kilblaine had of course rudely upset her plans for the future and the natural revulsion which had followed had left her with no inclination for anything but the enjoyment of her own freedom. Yet though Daingerfield was not so imminent a possibility as she would have had Haggerty

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believe, he had always remained a convenient refuge.

Dick Daingerfield worked tremendously hard at the profession of being idle and did it rather well. He had been born with the instinct to play, enjoyed people, competition of all sorts and was without an enemy. He had hunted big game in Africa, crossed the Atlantic in a yawl on a wager, been the hero of several hard-fought international polo matches, and come back from the war with a D.S.C. His most engaging quality was the very low opinion he held of his own qualities. He had tried several times a business career and lamentably failed, retailing his discomfitures with ready good humor for the amusement of his friends. He had a good supply of aunts, rich aunts in failing health who died at convenient intervals, to replace the sums he lost in land ventures, the launching of a new automobile, or a patent dredger. The last attempt at exploitation was so disastrous that his uncle, Benjamin R. Cragin, whose heir he was acknowledged to be, had called him into consultation and made a compact with him; he was to receive twenty thousand a year on the express condition that he should hereafter keep out of business.

He was standing by the fireplace as she came

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into the room with that trick of holding her head high, as though overlooking the crowd, which made people rate her as disdainful, which perhaps ordinarily she was.

He came forward eagerly and then stiffened at the sight of her loveliness. One of her greatest fascinations was her power to unfold a sudden dramatic beauty which in ordinary life she kept unsuspected.

"What's the matter, Dick?" She gave him her hand with a smile. Then, reading the reason in his dazzled glance, she said quickly, "No time for compliments. I want to talk seriously with you. I am in trouble."

"You?"

"That is, I may be," she said hurriedly. "I am facing a crisis to-night. I don't know how it is going to turn out. It may be nothing at all or it may be a real crisis. And, by the way, I sha'n't go with you to the opera. It's impossible. But I want you to go and I want you to telephone me at ten o'clock. If necessary, you will bring my mother and sister here at once. But until then, they are to know nothing."

"I'm rather slow at guessing, Rita," he said apologetically. "Just what's up? I imagine it's your father, is n't it?"

"Just what have you heard?" she asked quickly.

"Nothing more than every one. The story of the corner in International Motors — that's it, is n't it?"

"Yes, that's it," she answered, after a moment's hesitation. "There has been an attack on him, some friend has turned traitor."

"Tell me what I'm to do."

"If the worst comes to the worst, I want to raise a large sum — a very large sum, Dick, on my property, mother's and Cora's too, on this house, and the Newport place. Oh, there's ample security: the question is to get a quick loan."

"Before the market opens to-morrow?" he said thoughtfully.

"Yes, I am still in the dark. I sha'n't know definitely until I see my father in an hour or so. But I want to be prepared for anything that may come up."

"Whatever I have is yours, Rita," he replied, as a matter of course.

"Thank you. Of course, you know that's not possible. Whom have you you could go to to-night, if it were necessary? — Your uncle?"

"He would be the best," he said, after a mo-

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ment's thought. "The only one, I'm afraid. I imagine you are thinking of a large sum."

"Yes, a million—possibly two," she answered. "Could you take me to see him to-night — if it were absolutely necessary?"

"You bet I could."

"I don't want you to get any exaggerated ideas, Dick," she began, with a frown. "Perhaps it may sound terrifying to you. But this has come on so suddenly and there is so little time. What I don't want is anything public! I am taking every precaution — there are other ways too. I want to be prepared for anything — even," she added, with a little nervousness, the first she had shown, "even what I can't foresee."

"You don't need to tell me this," he replied, with a shrug. "Whatever I've got is yours, you know —"

"Yes, I know." She reflected a moment. "Perhaps it would be just as well to 'phone your uncle and ask to see him at half-past ten. If everything is all right, we can invent some pretext. This way we can be sure he'll be at home."

"By Jove, yes, that's an idea," he said hastily.

"There is a telephone in the next room."

“Right-o.”

“That is at least one anchor out,” she thought, turning to receive the guests.

The dinner was interminable. She hardly noticed what was placed before her, while the conversation was a meaningless babble. Her brother-in-law was still at Palm Beach. Her sister was a modern type who accorded as much liberty of movement to her husband as she arrogated to herself, and she had contrived, after five years of married life and the rearing of three children, to retain towards her husband an attitude of casual acquaintance. On the present occasion, while the ubiquitous Carleton Brady appeared as the male attendant of Mrs. Majendie, the daughter displayed a superior contentment in the attentions of the young Vicomte Benoit de Chapdeloupe, the scion of that illustrious French house which in each generation has had the ruin of an American fortune to its credit.

At another time, Mrs. Kilblaine might have relished, with her unfailing sense of humor, the total eclipse of the best that the American product could produce before the virtuosity of a young master. The Vicomte de Chapdeloupe at twenty-two had already discarded every illu-

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sion and reached that stage in his sentimental extravagances where he could repose on his record and permit himself to be loved, without any financial tax on a purse which was waiting to be filled. Whereas Brady possessed nothing but bad manners and had more cents than dollars in his pocket and none at all in his head, to make use of a pun of the day; De Chapdeloupe was impertinent with wit, condescending with charm and patronized his hosts with such limp, languid grace that Mrs. Majendie was visibly discontented with the comparison. The young Frenchman regaled them with the latest international scandals, seasoning them with the most outrageous innuendoes devoid of literal offense and delighted the ladies by his cynical and humorous dissections of the weaknesses and frailties of their sex. Daingerfield, who was of a generation when they bred the males for sturdier purposes, listened with amazement and a slumbering resentment that at other times would have found expression in some pointed sarcasm. But the knowledge of Rita's anxiety restrained him.

As a matter of fact, she heard nothing that was being said. Her imagination was with her father, trying to visualize him in the desperate ventures into which he was forced.

"He must have met with a rebuff," she thought uneasily, "or he would be back by now. Poor Daddy, how his pride must be suffering!"

She pictured him, hat in hand, waiting on Gunther or Forsheim or Slade. Her father a suppliant to such men! At the very thought a dull anger rose in her. After all, what was the basis of aristocracy in a vulgar modern world; nothing more than that same parvenu money without which generations of proud traditions could sink back into oblivion. If he would only come! If she could only know! Inaction to such a nature was torture. But to begin one must at least see the danger! A dozen times her eyes rose questioningly to Phillips as he passed in and out of the room — until all at once she saw it in his glance. Her father had returned. At last she could act. She nodded to Daingerfield and rose, calm and collected.

"My headache is really too bad," she said quickly, "I'm going to make my excuses. Don't rise. Good night, every one."

Chapter IX

Her father was in the library as she hurried in, seated by the table, his hand on the telephone, staring at the floor. He rose at the sound of her coming, and as he struggled to his feet she was appalled at the sudden physical collapse she beheld in him.

"So it's bad news?" she said, taking his right hand in both of hers.

He nodded, incapable of speech, and with a nervous look he returned to the table, his hand groping instinctively for the receiver and clinging to it.

"You are waiting for a message?"

"Yes, from Christiansen," he answered inaudibly.

She turned hurriedly and going to the doors, closed them. As she was returning, the telephone started to ring. Instantly he had snatched it up, waiting while it continued to buzz dully. She came and stood beside him, her hand on his shoulder, waiting too.

"All right, all right," he started irritably. "Yes, hello! Christiansen? Well?" He listened and then said slowly, "Gunther has — left — town? That is definite? I see. I understand. Thank you. You've done what you could. Thank you. No. No, nothing more. Good night, Christiansen."

He put the receiver back gingerly, stared down at his hands and absent-mindedly turned over his ring.

"Daddy!"

He looked up at her with a queer, tired smile.

"Well, dear," he said grimly, "I guess the game is over."

The agony of suspense now passed, he knew and was looking steadily into the future.

For a moment she could not believe it, and suffered one short moment of appalled consternation.

"Rita, dear?"

He held out his arms and caught her to him, and for a moment they clung together. Then she disengaged herself and rose.

"Now it's my turn," she said quietly.

He shook his head.

"It can't be done." His voice was even, but tired and far away. He rose but, as he started to cross, a sudden weakness caught

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him and he leaned heavily against the table for support.

"Wait there."

She went to a cabinet, poured out a little tumbler of brandy and came back.

"All right now, daddy, drink this. That's better. Straighten up. Now let's get to it. Exactly where do you stand?"

He spread out his hands in an empty gesture.

"Bankrupt?"

"Cleaned out!"

"How did it happen?"

He crossed to a chair and sat down, passing his hand across his forehead in an effort to concentrate. She stood before him, alert and unemotional.

"I speculated," he began slowly. "I had to. A last desperate chance. A pool to depress International Motors; Forschein, Kennedy, Slade. Slade sold us out; the others ran to cover. I — I was away. I owe —"

"Well — well?"

"Four to five millions more than I can pay!" he said, looking down.

Her hand went to her throat and an involuntary cry escaped her.

"Daddy, daddy, were you mad?"

"Yes, mad!" he said, with a shudder.

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"After all we went through!" she cried, aghast at the extent of his loss. "How could you again?"

He looked up at her again with that queer, feeble smile.

"Don't, Rita, it's bad enough. You don't think I'd have done it if I did n't have to!"

"You're right," she acknowledged with a long breath. "Wait a moment." She walked to the window and stood staring down. At that moment the car drew up and her mother and sister came down the steps. She was on the point of stopping them, but reflecting that an hour's difference would be unimportant, she refrained. Another thought came into her mind. Better not to invite a discussion. Now that a sacrifice must be made, it would be better to present it as an accomplished fact. She would arrange the loan and enforce their acquiescence — she would brook no wavering in such a crisis!

"There. What's over is over," she said quietly. "It's no time to talk of that. The thing now is how to meet this." She came to him, laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Look at me, daddy."

Unwillingly, he raised his glance to her confident smile.

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"This is going to be met! Understand that. Some way — some how!"

"Not this time, dear," he said, for the second time.

"Just what is the situation in International Motors?"

"I am ten thousand shares short at 150. To-morrow I shall have to settle at between 500 or 600. That is around four millions."

"Very well, we'll raise it. I have already laid my plans. I am going to put up what I have." All at once she shrank back, divining the truth. "Father — you've used it? And — and Cora's? Not Cora's, too?"

His head sunk suddenly into his hands.

She stifled the exclamation on her lips.

"No, no — listen, daddy. I'm not going to blame you. No matter what has happened. It's the family. It's the name. We are going to save that, do you understand?" she continued, clenching her fists. "Steady now! Pull yourself together." She glanced at the clock which marked ten minutes of nine. "Finish that glass. Better? Now quickly. I want to know all. How long has this been going on?"

She waited, dreading the worst.

"I've lived on the ragged edge for months," he said, straightening up a little and talking

rapidly in an effort to justify himself. "My God, you don't know what this has been, this period of deflation. I've felt the ground slipping from under me day by day. Everything cut in half, dropping, dropping! Ten months ago I was a very rich man, now —! And then there were friends."

"What do you mean by friends?"

"I gave endorsements to pull them through; men who are sound as a rock came to me for help. I carried them at the bank. And for that I am personally responsible."

"But then they must help you."

"Not in twenty-four hours," he replied, with a shake of his head. "Oh, I did n't want to speculate! I kept from it as long as I could. I had to. There was no way out — I was desperate! And now, bankruptcy!"

"Then we shall meet it. In the first place, there is this house, the Newport place and the house at Southampton. Mother must be told at once. I've prepared for all that. I'll have her here in an hour."

He raised his hand feebly.

"Don't, dear — not that."

"You've already tried? She refused? Oh, daddy!"

"She will always refuse," he said heavily.

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"Not when it's a question of honor!" she cried indignantly.

He shook his head incredulously.

"Besides, it would not save me in time!"

"But your friends, — Kennedy?"

"No."

"Forscheim and Marx?"

"I have seen them. They have made up their minds to sacrifice me. There was a conference yesterday, a conference of my friends! The situation needs a victim. I am to be the scapegoat."

"But Gunther? Surely Gunther. I'll go to him myself!"

He waved toward the telephone.

"My friend Gunther has conveniently left town!"

"But why — why all this! Every one is being carried? Why not you? And then the Fidelity?" Again the feeling came to her that he was withholding something, that beyond all she knew was something lurking, grim and frightful. "Daddy, you have not told me the worst! What is it?"

"To-morrow, at ten o'clock, the Fidelity will close its doors."

"Why?"

He did not answer.

She came nearer, frightened and dreading to hear what now she saw staring her in the face.

"If the Fidelity must close its doors —" she began slowly. "But great heavens! That means a panic, a terrible panic! Why do they permit that? Daddy, you have n't done anything — anything wrong!"

"Yes," he said in a whisper.

"Dishonor? Arrest?"

He had no need to answer. She knew at last. At last what her instinct had warned her of stood stark before her. She understood now all that had oppressed her these last weak hours. Not poverty, but dishonor! A Majendie dragged before the bar of justice, pilloried in the public print — the first stain upon the name. She knew now why his quest of the afternoon had been in vain as all at once she comprehended to what depths of humiliation he must have descended.

"He will never face it," she thought, with a sudden chill. "There is only one thing left for him to do — if I fail."

At this moment, from the clock on the mantel, the hour rang.

"Nine o'clock. Haggerty!" came mechanically into her mind. Then she realized that all this while she had been struggling against the

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inevitable, against the thing which she had divined from the first, but against which she had obstinately set her will. Haggerty or —

She went to her father and knelt at his side, and when she spoke it was with a great gentleness, as one who no longer struggles.

“Better tell me, daddy; I know you never meant anything wrong, that you were mad when you did it. I’m not going to blame you. I love you always. Tell me — what have you done that is wrong?”

“I borrowed funds that I can’t replace,” he said, staring beyond her. “I can make them good, but not now, not immediately. That, in the eyes of the law, is a crime.”

She rose satisfied that she knew the worst and stood considering.

“Daddy. Think carefully. Is there no way out? Is there no one — no friend in the world who will help you?” she asked, but already she knew that there was but one way left.

“Christiansen has tried every way. Rita, there is no escape.”

“What would save you?”

“To save the Fidelity? A loan of five millions, at the least.”

“It is solvent?”

“Of course.”

"And you?"

He looked at her dazed. She repeated the question sharply.

"If I could settle at — at one hundred and fifty a share —"

"That would pull you through? That is the truth, the whole truth?"

"Absolutely."

"You are holding back nothing?"

"On my word of honor."

"Very well. The rest concerns me."

Suddenly he jerked up in his chair at the sound of a knock on the door.

"Hold on to yourself. Steady," she said, frowning. "Get your nerves together, daddy. All right." She watched him a moment and then, satisfied, turned to the door. "Come!"

Phillips appeared.

She glanced again at the clock.

"It's Mr. Haggerty, is n't it?"

"Yes, madam."

"When I ring, show him up."

Majendie had started to his feet.

"Haggerty! What does this mean?"

"This concerns me."

"Yes, but — good God, Rita!"

"No questions — now or hereafter," she said sternly.

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"Haggerty! Never!" he cried, drawing himself up. "Not that!"

"You forget, father," she said, meeting his glance with one of equal determination. "This is not simply a question of bankruptcy. It is now the *honor* of the family. That is now in my hands alone." She waited until his glance dropped before her accusing look and then added quietly, "And now, give me the pistol that is in your pocket." As he started back, she added quickly. "If I fail — but I shall not fail! Put it in the drawer." He obeyed mechanically, completely dominated. "Now listen. Once before I saved the day. Don't forget that. That sacrifice is not going to be in vain! Now I have the right to make the terms. No questions. Let that be understood between us. It is? Very well. Now wait in the little room."

He stood a long moment, torn by conflicting passions, but in the end he yielded and went slowly out. She crossed to the door and assured herself that he was not listening. Then closing it, she returned and rang.

Chapter X

She had waited a moment before ringing. For the last hour she had foreseen this meeting and steeled herself for the interview. Whatever happened, she determined that she would not add to Haggerty's satisfaction by any display of weakness. She was standing erect, her head thrown proudly back, a smile of scorn on her lips, as he came in.

"I must apologize for not being dressed," he began, — "I've been on the jump since I saw you."

"Yes. I can understand that you have been quite busy," she countered with intention. "My congratulations!"

"What do you mean?" he said, stopping short in the act of offering his hand.

"I underrated you. I was very stupid. You are a terrible antagonist, Dan Haggerty."

"Well?" he said carefully.

"You see, I did n't know the cards you held. How you must have enjoyed it!"

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"Enjoyed what?"

"My fatuous egotism," she replied, forcing a smile.

"Um-m-" he said, still watching her. "You did rub it in a little."

He turned, seeking a chair.

"Shall we sit down?"

"No," she said decisively. "Hardly necessary. This is a business matter. I sha' n't detain you more than a moment."

He understood the frigid rebuff of her attitude and his lips straightened out into that stubborn rigidity which spelled danger to those who knew him.

"I'm not going to beat about the bush," she said, throwing back her head. "You know my way of facing things: 'what has to be done shall be done'!"

"I believe I remarked that first."

"Yes, you did appreciate that in me. Well, Mr. Haggerty, you've won!"

"Hello, what's that mean?"

"Come. Be as frank as I am," she said disdainfully. "My father is on the verge of ruin. I have just learned it. And I know now that you knew it."

"That's true!"

"Thanks for your honesty, at least. That is

what I meant when I referred to the enjoyment you must have derived from our last meeting."

"I see."

"There is no use in concealing anything," she continued slowly. "It is not only ruin; it is disgrace — dishonor in the worst form. What, you did n't know that?" she exclaimed, at a movement of surprise she observed in him.

"No," he replied frowning. "No, I certainly did not."

"More." Involuntarily she glanced toward the door, sinking her voice. "It may be a question of my father's life. That is what I am faced with, Mr. Haggerty," she added with a look of accusation and hatred. "You see I recognize that there is no other way out."

"Why do you tell me this?" he began slowly.

"To acknowledge that you have won what you set out to do!" she said abruptly. "Don't let's waste words. You've won. I acknowledge it. I've called you here to make a bargain with you."

"Bargain?"

"Save him, and I am yours whenever you wish it."

The directness and arrogance of her method staggered him. His face showed his amazement.

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"I wonder if you realize just what you're saying," he said sternly.

"I shall belong to you whenever you call me," she repeated scornfully. "I prefer not to use another word. That is what you have plotted for. Does it need to be plainer?"

"No, no. Quite sufficient."

To her surprise, he stood staring at her, so intently and so long that all at once a dreadful thought came to her. What if he should refuse!

"You have strange ways of asking assistance," he began grimly.

"Assistance, oh, please!" she retorted, with a sudden flare-up.

"There are even ways of being gracious — in bargains!" he continued, flushing under her disdainful look.

"I suppose you would prefer supplications, tears!"

"You rate yourself very high."

"Yes, very high!"

He shook his head.

"What pride!"

"Well?" she said coldly.

"And you even disdain to ask me to be seated?"

She did not turn her glance from him, but something cold took hold of her.

"Well?" she repeated inaudibly.

All at once he drew back and she saw that he had made his decision.

"You have made the terms yourself? Remember that!"

"I have."

"Very well, I accept them," he said suddenly.

"I knew you would."

She closed her eyes, fighting off a sudden weakness.

"You may sleep quietly to-night, Mrs. Kilblaine," he continued, taking pity on her. "There is no longer any danger. You may inform your father that the corner in International Motors is over. I shall permit him to settle for the ten thousand shares he has to deliver — at the price he sold. Is that satisfactory?"

"Yes — but the Fidelity Trust?"

"What do you need?"

"Five millions," she said faintly. "Five millions to-morrow morning."

"I understand." He pulled out a check book and went to the table. "Have I now your permission to sit down?" he asked ironically.

She nodded, dominated by his mastery of the scene.

"Thank you," he said punctiliously and, as he wrote, he continued, "I am making out a

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check. As president of the Sea Line Trust, I shall open an account with the Fidelity Trust for five million dollars. If that is not sufficient, I'll double it!" He blotted the check carefully. "However, when I get through telephoning, that won't be necessary." He rose and came to her. "Here is your check. Give it to your father. He will sleep quieter."

She allowed him to put the check in her hands, so utterly taken back at the largeness of his gesture that for a moment she could find nothing to say. She gazed at the little slip of paper in her fingers that meant life and security—five million dollars—and then she stared at him.

"What!" she cried involuntarily. "You give me this — now — like this!"

"Not as a friend," he said pointedly, "but like this."

"You are going to *trust* me?"

"I trust you," he said quickly. "There is a great deal of pride in your family, Rita Kilblaine, and pride is easily analyzed. We've all got our code. There is always some one thing a person won't do. A Majendie may conceivably do a lot of things, misappropriate funds, ruin innocent people, default — but you won't break your personal word! Your word is sufficient. When I want you, I'll call for you,

as you have expressed it. Now, since you no longer need anything of me, — good night!”

When Mr. Majendie came slipping in—a long moment after, he found her still standing, the check in her hand, gazing at the door through which Haggerty had gone, and over her set eyes a furrow.

“Here is the check,” she said, and then, as he glanced at it with a cry and turned toward her, dreadful questions in his eyes, she came to him and taking his head in her hands, kissed him on the forehead.

“It’s over,” she said wearily, “we shall go on.”

Chapter XI

Mr. Majendie at the great flat Renaissance desk, while pretending to read the morning paper, was covertly watching his daughter, the reason for which lay in a front-page story from Washington detailing the testimony of Daniel Haggerty, just returned from Mexico by way of Europe. A moment before, Mrs. Kilblaine, entering the room, had picked up the paper, studied the headlines, frowned, and abruptly putting it down had wandered over to the bridge table where Mrs. Chalfonte and the young Vicomte de Chapdeloupe were enjoying a very profitable session at the expense of Mrs. Majendie and Captain Daingerfield, who had unfortunately thrice drawn his hostess. Mrs. Kilblaine was standing back of her sister but it was plain to her father that her attention was anywhere but on the progress of the game. At this moment, looking up, she surprised his anxious gaze, and, turning, went to a little table where she took up a cigarette,

toyed with it a moment and lit it. When she returned to the card players, she had changed her position so that her back was to him. Nevertheless, he continued to watch her slightest movement with a look of sustained and profound anxiety.

Six months had passed since the crisis of the spring. Thanks to Haggerty's intervention and the upward movement of the stock market, Majendie's position was again secure, and the peril from which he had been snatched known only to a few. Rita had suddenly made up her mind to a trip to Europe and had sailed the next week. Ten days ago she had returned, uncommunicative and openly bent on avoiding all his attempts to see her alone. Haggerty, too, had paid a flying visit to London, Paris and Rome and then departed for Mexico. Had they met abroad? Twenty times he had wished to put the question to her and each time recoiled, lacking the courage. He had kept his promise to his daughter and had asked no questions, though the effort cost him dear in remorse and foreboding. A month ago an event had occurred which seemed to him providential and to which his tortured conscience clung as to a straw. Mrs. Haggerty had died in the asylum to which she had been confined for a decade. What

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effect would this have on a situation which he perceived but darkly; into which he feared to penetrate? For days he had sought some clue in the conduct of his daughter, waiting for some favorable moment to return to the old affectionate intimacy which would justify a confidence. Her attitude had left him heavy-hearted and brooding. She came and went stonily, answered perfunctorily and shut herself up in her own rooms for long periods of moody isolation. When he watched her and she detected it, she showed, as now, an irritation that amounted to almost hostility.

"Set you back four tricks, mother," said Mrs. Chalfonte triumphantly, gathering up the cards.

"Four? Impossible — two."

Mrs. Majendie protested, argued and finally appealed in vain to her partner, who was adding the disaster to an already gloomy record in the honor score.

"I'd have let them play spades if I'd only known what you had! How was I to tell you had all those spades? You looked so glum. I say, Dick, you looked so glum! It's terribly misleading!"

Captain Daingerfield apologized in dumb show.

"Besides, I could n't let them go rubber,

could I? They have such a frightful honor score. You see, my object was to prevent their going rubber."

"In that you were eminently successful, Mrs. Majendie," said the Captain, like a gentleman and a soldier.

"Then I thought surely you'd go up to four spades," protested Mrs. Majendie, turning to the Vicomte. "Why did n't you, Benoit? You play such a funny game! You never do what I want you to do."

"I can't afford to," said De Chapdeloupe, with a satisfied sidelong glance at the score. "Honors, Cora? Simple to us? Yes."

"Your deal, partner," said Captain Daingerfield mechanically.

Rita turned away and moved towards the door as though to leave the room. Then with a glance at the clock she stopped and returned.

"Are you going with us later, Rita?" asked Mrs. Majendie, dealing the cards.

"What? Yes, I rather think so."

She stood behind her sister, watching the sorting of the hand.

"If we're going to put in an appearance at the Dalgeeshes', do let us finish this rubber," said Mrs. Chalfonte. "It's four now, mother, and it takes you hours to dress."

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"Oh, a charity bazaar!" said Mrs. Majendie indifferently. She took up her hand and put it down impatiently. Then, looking at it more carefully, she gave a little start of pleased surprise and looked over hopefully at her partner, who continued inscrutable.

"But you are in charge of a table," insisted Mrs. Chalfonte impatiently. "Do hurry, moth-er!"

"Well, what are we waiting for?" asked Mrs. Majendie, looking around.

"Beautiful lady, it's your declaration," said De Chapdeloupe.

Mrs. Majendie looked at her partner doubtfully.

"Oh — what's the score?"

"They are twenty-eight to our nothing on the rubber," volunteered Captain Daingerfield, "and a few thousand points in honors. It is four o'clock and I have only five thousand dollars in the bank."

"One diamond," said Mrs. Majendie after a moment, but almost immediately she caught herself. "Oh, I mean one heart."

"Really, mother!" exclaimed Mrs. Chalfonte, laying down her hand.

"But I did n't see I had the —"

"Moth-er!"

"Is it my fault?" said Mrs. Majendie, flustered. "Do you think it fair? I had n't really looked at my hand! I can't play if every one's going to talk!"

Mrs. Chalfonte shrugged her shoulders and addressing De Chapdeloupe by his pet name, said acidly:

"My dear Pom Pom, don't think that *all* American bridge is like this!"

"Oh, but I've played a lot of games like this in Paris, really, I assure you!" replied De Chapdeloupe politely.

"Saucy boy!" said Mrs. Majendie, giving him a playful tap on the hand.

"Two spades," said Mrs. Chalfonte sharply.

"Pass," said Captain Daingerfield quickly.

De Chapdeloupe looked at Mrs. Majendie, who after a long struggle and repeated glances at her partner said:

"Oh, dear. I know they'll go out in spades! You said nothing, Dick?"

"Nothing."

"It's so provoking when your partner does n't give you any information. After this, I'm going to play with Pom Pom."

"Oh, dear lady, France has suffered so much already!" said De Chapdeloupe wickedly.

"Pom Pom, you're a wretch."

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"Well, mother?"

"What time is it? Four o'clock? Well, pass."

Captain Daingerfield sighed heavily with relief and they began to play the hand. At this moment a footman entered with the mail which he placed on the desk. Mrs. Kilblaine presently, with an appearance of carelessness, left the card players. Mr. Majendie behind his paper watched her take up the letters and run through them hurriedly, replacing them with evident disappointment, then more slowly run through the pile again and put it down. As she raised her head, she met the glance of her father fixed on her. She frowned and went out.

"Game and rubber!" cried Mrs. Chalfonte, jumping up, and going over to her father she whispered, "Really, mother is impossible! Poor Dick has lost every rubber. What's in the paper?"

"Luck was against us, Mrs. Majendie," said Captain Daingerfield, taking out his check book.

"You think I'm dreadfully reckless, don't you, Dick?" said that lady doubtfully.

"No, no — a little enthusiastic. All women are more enthusiastic than men."

"It's a quality of youth," said De Chapdeloupe, bowing to Mrs. Majendie. "You are so much younger than the rest of us, beautiful lady."

"Flatterer," replied Mrs. Majendie with a grateful smile.

"The papers are full of Haggerty again," said Mrs. Chalfonte with an exclamation.

"Haggerty? Haggerty?" said Mrs. Majendie. "Oh, yes. But I thought he was in Mexico."

"He is down in Washington before some committee or other. Farm credits — stupid stuff."

"It's astonishing the attention the papers give such a person!" exclaimed Mrs. Majendie rising. "He goes to Europe—headline. He goes to Mexico—headline. He returns—more headlines! You'd think he was *some one*! Why, he can't turn over in his bed without a special edition being put out. Such publicity!"

"Well, mother, it seems to me every time *you* move it gets in the paper!" interjected Mrs. Chalfonte, who was in a fretful mood.

"That's quite different! I suppose this means we'll have to entertain this Haggerty again. Rita is so fond of slumming!"

"You know, really," said Captain Daingerfield, smiling, "Dan Haggerty is a good deal of a man."

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"*You say so?*" said Mrs. Majendie, amazed.

"I saw him in action," replied Captain Daingerfield. "For he was in action, after all, when he could just as well have stayed behind and done the organizing. He did his bit and took no favors. I'm afraid I'm rather prejudiced in favor of Haggerty, Mrs. Majendie."

"Well, now that his wife's dead, he will be marrying some opera singer," said Mrs. Chalfonte. "They all do!"

"Well, he stuck to her for ten years, did n't he?" retorted Daingerfield.

"As you wish — but I don't see why that's a reason for our receiving him," insisted Mrs. Chalfonte, shrugging her shoulders.

Captain Daingerfield did not reply to this. He made his adieux punctiliously.

"You're coming to the bazaar?" asked Mrs. Majendie anxiously.

"Yes. I'm going out with Rita now but we're turning up later."

"Mind you buy lots of things from me!" She turned to De Chapdeloupe, who was likewise preparing to depart. "Pom Pom, you've promised to help me out."

"Well, the idea!" cried Mrs. Chalfonte indignantly. "As though he had no engagement with me!"

"He certainly promised," said Mrs. Majendie obstinately. "Who's to help me make change? Pom Pom, what are you grinning at now?"

"How modern! Mother and daughter fighting over the same man!" said De Chapdeloupe, who never missed an impertinence. "Dear ladies, I shall call for you both — at four o'clock."

"Really, you are getting too spoiled!" said Mrs. Majendie indulgently. "I shall have to marry you off."

"But that's what I'm here for!" De Chapdeloupe turned to Mrs. Chalfonte who gave him a look and turned a cold shoulder to him.

"*Tiens*, but that's real affection," he remarked impudently, and departed.

No sooner had he left the room than Mr. Majendie, who had followed the scene with ill-concealed distaste, broke out:

"Cora, you made certain remarks which I consider in very bad taste!"

"What now?" said Mrs. Chalfonte, who for pecuniary reasons stood a little in awe of her father.

"What you may do in your own house is not my affair. But if I choose to invite Dan Haggerty to my home, I do not propose to have my actions criticized. Is that clear?"

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"Well, since the day I was born!" said Mrs. Chalfonte.

"Furthermore. I totally disagree with you in your estimation of Mr. Haggerty — totally! Is *that* clear?"

"Quite," said Mrs. Chalfonte, flushing and looking at her mother, who exclaimed:

"But, Alonzo, six months ago you could n't abide the man!"

"I?" said Mr. Majendie frigidly. "I have no such recollection."

"What? Why, I remember well — why, you said to Rita in my presence —"

"At that time," Mr. Majendie interrupted, "I did not know the man. I believed him to be a freebooter from the West — a gambler, a wrecker."

"But you don't *like* the man?"

"Personally, I don't know him. And yet I am inclined to agree with Dick's estimate of him."

"All of which means that you need this Haggerty person's support in some business deal!" said Mrs. Majendie, bridling up. "Oh, I understand! Nowadays a woman's drawing-room is only a part of the business offices of her husband!"

"Sometimes that is rather necessary to the

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permanence of the drawing-room, my dear.” He picked up his mail and went out with a parting shot. “However, if Mr. Haggerty calls, kindly receive him as *my* friend.”

Chapter XII

"Really, I don't know what's gotten into your father lately," said Mrs. Majendie, looking at her daughter. "He's so irritable, so irritable! I can't say a word to him! Has it struck you that he has been acting strangely of late?"

Mrs. Chalfonte, whose quarrel with her mother took precedence, shrugged her shoulders indifferently.

"No more than usual."

"Well, he has!" said Mrs. Majendie with conviction. "The absurdity of his standing up for Haggerty! Before you know it, he'll be pushing Rita into his arms. Mrs. Daniel Haggerty is a nice name to bring into this family. Up to now neither the Majendies nor the Highgates have ever descended to a *mésalliance*. Have you ever thought of that?"

"Nonsense. Rita'll end up by marrying Dick. You do get such queer ideas in your head!"

"I'd almost believe this Haggerty had some hold over your father," said Mrs. Majendie, pursuing her thought, "if I had n't taken pains to find out that he's solid as a rock. But then I don't understand; I don't understand. He's so moody and so nervous and he flies into a temper over nothing. Scenes, scenes!" she cried, pressing her jewelled fingers in distress to her temples. "So unnecessary, so vulgar! I'm all nerves! I have n't any desire left to go to that poky bazaar."

"Oh, yes, you'll go," said Mrs. Chalfonte, seeing her opening.

"Indeed, why?"

"You forget. Pom Pom is coming for you!"

"Now just what do you mean by that?" cried Mrs. Majendie, stopping short with a furious glance at her daughter, who continued to look at her with a sarcastic smile.

"You know very well!" said Mrs. Chalfonte pointedly and then, her irritation carrying away her caution, she burst out angrily, "It's the same story, always the same story! Every man I bring into this house! It's humiliating! I'm the laughing stock of New York! And my children's grandmother, too!"

"I never heard of anything so ridiculous!" said Mrs. Majendie, with the rising inflection.

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"All these tantrums just because Benoit offered to help me out — as any gentleman should!"

"Offered!" exclaimed Mrs. Chalfonte, with a hard laugh.

"Yes, offered!"

"You know very well you commanded him to!" cried Mrs. Chalfonte angrily. "If you want some one to fetch and carry, why don't you use Carleton Brady? I let you have him; is n't one enough?"

At this auspicious moment, the phlegmatic young Mr. Chalfonte, temporarily at home, sauntered into the room and stopped with a long-drawn-out whistle of surprise.

"Hello, storm up?"

Mrs. Chalfonte turned at once to her husband for support.

"Oscar, I leave it to you," she cried. "Life is perfectly unendurable here. I can't bring a single man that's devoted to me into this house, but mother annexes him. If he makes an engagement with me, she breaks it and without 'by your leave,' as though I were in short dresses, as though I did n't count! Oh, I won't stand it!" she cried, stamping her foot in rage. "I'm not going to be made the laughing stock of New York!"

"Oscar, your wife is not only impertinent

but insulting!" cried Mrs. Majendie, whose little foot began to tap the floor furiously.

"Oh, I am, am I?"

"Yes, you are. And it's high time your husband interfered!"

"My husband?"

"Yes, your husband!"

Chalfonte, caught between the horns of a dilemma, scratched his head and said carefully:

"Well, let's hear all about it."

The two ladies exclaimed in a breath, "It was this way—"

"One moment, one moment, Cora dear," said Chalfonte suavely. "Let your mother have her say. You can give your side afterward."

"Oh, *you*. I know you," said Mrs. Majendie indignantly. "You'll stand up for your wife, of course."

"Nevertheless, I am listening."

"Cora has just been making a disgraceful scene," said Mrs. Majendie tearfully; "saying the most outrageous things. Really, I never thought to live to hear a daughter—"

"Oh, come to the point," said Mrs. Chalfonte angrily.

"Yes," said Chalfonte, glancing at his watch, "what is the point?"

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"The point? Nothing at all — absolutely nothing — a mountain out of a mole hill — a scene of jealousy because Pom Pom —"

"Pom Pom?" said Chalfonte, raising his eyebrows, "who the devil is Pom Pom? Please explain. I've been away three months. You can't expect me to keep up. Who is Pom Pom? Young Carleton Brady?"

"Don't be sarcastic, Oscar," said Mrs. Majendie. "I'm referring to the Vicomte de Chapdeloupe and you know it!"

"Pardon me, I did n't know it," said Chalfonte, who took life with a set smile. "The last time I officiated, it was Brady. But that is of no importance. I understand now. I remember De Chapdeloupe, but not as Pom Pom."

As her mother refused to continue, Mrs. Chalfonte burst out:

"Every man I bring into this house, Oscar, mother snatches from me. You know it's true. You've seen it. It was the same with Carleton Brady and Larrimore and Teddy Fair and I don't know how many others —"

"Yes, but what happened to-day?"

"To-day. Well, yes, to-day! What do you think happened to-day? De Chapdeloupe invited me to the bazaar — made the engagement a week ago — and when I come here,

what do I find? I find that mother has calmly commanded him to assist her in her booth, to make change, to wrap up parcels, to bring her a cup of tea! And I don't count; I'm to be left out in the cold. And this is the way it goes on every single time. It's a wonder I ever got a chance to marry you! Now I appeal to you, is it fair? Is it just? Well, why don't you say something to her; you might at least stand up for me!"

"My dear mother-in-law," began Chalfonte deliberately and judiciously.

"Of course, you side with *her*," exclaimed Mrs. Majendie angrily.

"Well — yes," said Chalfonte, without a trace of excitement. "I think, really — honestly, there is a good deal to be said for Cora. You know this is not the first time."

"I want mother to keep off my property!" cried Mrs. Chalfonte tearfully. "I think I have certain rights that ought to be respected."

"Quite right, my dear, quite right!" said Chalfonte soothingly. "That's what I'm going to make your mother understand."

"You'll make me understand nothing at all," retorted Mrs. Majendie on the point of departure, when all at once she uttered an exclamation at the appearance of her husband, who,

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attracted by the sound of the altercation, had come into the salon.

"What does all this mean?" he demanded curtly, glancing from one to the other.

"My dear father-in-law," said Chalfonte, who had a sense of humor, "my wife is complaining of your wife for serious infringements of her property rights."

"In plain English, Eloise, what does he mean?" said Majendie.

Mrs. Majendie, who had no desire to bring such matters to his attention, shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't know any more than you. Ask your daughter. I have been insulted. That's all I care to know."

Whereupon she flounced away and out of the door.

"Cora, to what is your mother referring?"

"Ask Oscar. I've been humiliated enough already," said Mrs. Chalfonte, departing in turn.

"Well?" said Majendie, turning to his son-in-law.

"Well?" replied the other, shrugging his shoulders.

"Am I to have any explanation?"

"My dear father-in-law, what's the use?

We modern husbands must keep out of the way when our wives decide to quarrel — otherwise we appear too ridiculous! Don't you think?"

"Why don't you handle Cora with a tighter rein?" said Majendie, frowning. "She is your wife, after all."

"My dear father-in-law, pardon me, you are married too. The point of discussion is the respective rights of our wives in a young gentleman by the name of De Chapdeloupe or Pom Pom as I believe he is more tenderly called."

"Oh!" said Majendie with a gloomy look.

"I naturally must take the side of my wife, — while you —"

"Enough!" Mr. Majendie made a gesture to cut him short, "I fail to see the humor in such scenes."

"It's only if you don't," said Chalfonte, smiling, "that they are annoying."

Mr. Majendie was on the point of a retort against this easy-going philosophy when Phillips came in with a telegram on a tray.

"For me, Phillips?"

"For Mrs. Kilblaine, sir." He hesitated a moment and then continued, "I'm very sorry, sir, there was a mistake, a very regrettable mistake. I wish to express my regret, sir."

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"What do you mean by all that, Phillips?"

"The new footman received the telegram this morning, sir, and left it on the table, intending to deliver it. His explanation is not quite satisfactory. I'm sorry, exceedingly sorry, it happened."

"I am going in to see my daughter," said Mr. Majendie. "I'll give it to her."

He nodded to Chalfonte and went into Mrs. Kilblaine's salon where he found Rita at the desk writing.

"Telegram for you, dear. Came this morning, but was misplaced."

She took it and read it slowly without change of expression, while, held by the same premonition which had decided him to deliver it in person, he waited, seeking some indication in her expression.

"Well?"

"Well what?"

"Anything wrong?"

"No. Nothing wrong."

She looked again and slowly tore it to pieces and dropped them in the waste basket.

"Is that from Mr. Haggerty?" he asked suddenly.

She looked at him a moment, and then answered. "Yes, from Mr. Haggerty."

Chapter XIII

Since her return from Europe, Rita had sedulously avoided an interview with her father. She knew that sooner or later he would seek to force an explanation. She felt it in his restlessness, his prolonged moments of abstraction, the furtive glances that continually followed her to be immediately withdrawn the moment she turned. She knew that he suffered and she pitied him, yet between them lay one topic that she could not discuss, come what might.

So, on the present occasion, she felt almost a panic at his entrance and was seeking some excuse to withdraw, when, to her consternation, he said, "So Mr. Haggerty is coming to see you?"

She went to the desk, picking up her needlework replying in a matter-of-fact tone:

"Yes, Mr. Haggerty announces his impending arrival." Then, feeling that this gave an impression of compulsion she did not wish to convey, she added lightly, "In fact, I am expecting him any moment."

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"Then you are going to see him?"

She looked up in assumed surprise and was struck with the solicitude in his eyes.

"Of course. Why not?"

As she turned to go he said quickly, "Why do you avoid me, Rita dear?"

"I?"

"Yes, you. I have not seen you a moment alone since your return."

"What a funny idea, daddy!"

"Sit down then. I want to talk to you."

She hesitated, looked at him, frowned and finally decided to face the inevitable.

"All right."

She sat down and, taking up her needlework, busied herself with her embroidery. He waited a moment and then, moving about, said precisely, "I am glad you are going to see him." He went to the desk and mechanically began to rearrange the pile of correspondence that lay there. "Very glad!"

"Yes, I find Mr. Haggerty a most interesting man. We both do, don't we?" she remarked casually. "I am really quite flattered —" She nodded her head in a little extra affirmation. "Quite."

"You saw a good deal of him in Paris?"

"I? I did n't see him at all."

"But he was over there."

"I repeat, I did n't see him at all."

"I had hoped you had."

"Really? Why?"

He stared at her, clearly nonplussed at her attitude. Then, drawing a desk weight towards him, he began, without taking his eyes from her, "I have changed my opinion about Haggerty." He waited a moment. "I thought you might be interested to know that." Again he waited, but as this statement likewise provoked no response, he continued, "As a matter of fact, we all have. We misjudged Haggerty. You see, in Wall Street we have certain prejudices and we are apt to be a little severe in our reception of the newcomer — particularly from the West. We are not very hospitable. Why? Because finance is grounded on stability. Wall Street has always been organized on the principle of checks and counter-checks — well established groups offsetting one another, balancing one another, assuring stability of power. The moment some new force is injected, the equilibrium of the whole is threatened. That is why our instinct is always to repel a newcomer. Sometimes we are somewhat merciless in our methods. I am trying to explain the attitude of myself and others, —"

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"Towards Mr. Haggerty last spring?" she interrupted. "Yes, I understand. And now that he has proven himself too strong to be kept out?"

"Not entirely that, Rita," he said, relieved to have found at last some response. "Not entirely. Of course the man is a force — a very big force. Still we have had to deal with a good many big men before this and eliminated them. No, it is something more than that. Haggerty is a constructive force."

"I've always told you that."

"Quite extraordinary the position he has made for himself in so short a time," he continued, surprised and yet pleased at her acquiescence. "He looks at big things in a big way. He has imagination. He has what few men have — vision."

"It will be an interesting career to watch, won't it?" she remarked meditatively.

"Then the man himself is big. You feel that about him. People like him. Big men like him and he has one remarkable quality."

"What is that?"

"He wins over his enemies."

"I wonder!" she said, with an involuntary drawing together of her eyebrows. But immediately, to cover up her emotion, she added,

"Of course you did not always feel this way about him!"

"I?"

"You told me he was unscrupulous and ruthless. You said other things but I remember that particularly."

"Did I?" he said, frowning. "That was unfair; ruthless perhaps — unscrupulous? No."

"On the contrary, I think your estimate correct."

"Rita, there are two ways of looking at such men, — self-made men, exceptional men who possess that tremendous dynamic energy that brings new forces up through the crust of society. One way is to judge them by the means they use to arrive; the other is to judge them by what they create when they arrive. Why do you smile?"

"I was thinking," she interjected, "that Mr. Haggerty would agree with you. I remember his saying something like that to me — that there were, as he expressed it, these two phases in the life of every successful man."

"Remember that every one's hand was against him six months ago."

"Yet to me," she said directly, "Mr. Haggerty will always be quite ruthless when he wants anything and quite unscrupulous. Oh,

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these are the qualities, I suppose, that go with the make-up of a big man."

He was irritated by her persistence and showed it by the abruptness of his retort.

"Well, I like him!"

She put down her needlework and looked at him.

"You do?"

"I do, yes; I like Mr. Haggerty very much."

A moment of silence ensued. She returned to her needlework, while her father, rising from the desk, went slowly around it, until he had come behind her. He stood a moment watching her at her work.

"You're getting on famously!"

She lifted up the pattern.

"Like it?"

"What a lot of work!"

"It's a Gothic pattern. This goes down the middle. I'm making a table runner."

He laid his hand gently on her shoulder.

"My little girl!"

She covered his hand with hers, yet with a little nervous shudder she could not repress.

"My dear old daddy!"

He leaned over and kissed her forehead.

"Don't ever change toward your father, dear,"

he said, greatly moved, "no matter what has happened!"

"Never, never!"

"We've stood together a long time, you and I, dear."

"We've had to, have n't we?" she said with assumed brightness.

"You're the one — the great — the only love in my life, little girl," he continued huskily. "You've never failed me. I never forget that. The whole world revolves about you and my pride in you. That's something can never change, never grow less. There's nothing you've done, nothing you may do, can ever alter that."

She gave a little pat to his hand and looked up smiling with shining eyes.

"And, Rita," he added solemnly, "there's nothing you need ever fear to tell me. Anything you have had to suffer is for me to share."

"I understand," she replied in a low voice.

He left her and walking away, said, "The tragic thing — my God, how tragic it is, too! — the tragic thing is that it's always been you I've had to sacrifice. Life's been tough on you, dear."

She felt where he was leading her, but was powerless to divert the conversation.

"One thing we made up our minds to pretty

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early," she said proudly, "the Majendie name was never to be humbled. Well, we've kept it high. When you accomplish one thing you set out to do, it does compensate for all the rest. We have n't failed, daddy. That's some satisfaction."

"No, *you* have n't failed," he answered slowly. "But I — I — who adore you, when I think that I am the one who has forced you —"

"Daddy!" she cried, laying down her work. "Why bring that up? The past is a door you've got to close and lock. I never go back. What's the use? Besides, I know why you did it."

"Do you really?" he asked eagerly.

"Of course. It was for me, — and Rodney," she said quietly, "to leave us a great fortune. I've always known that!"

He drew a long breath of relief.

"Yes, Rita dear, it was that. If I went beyond my depth, it was for you two. And you understood! Thank God for that. You first, Rodney afterward. Your future, your happiness, is the one aim of my life, — the one thing that haunts me."

"Haunts you?"

"Haunts me!"

He kept the silence a moment and then, approaching her once more, stood at her shoulder.

"Rita, my dear little girl, it would make me very, very happy if I saw you married to Dan Haggerty."

"Daddy!"

The cry escaped her. She was caught utterly off her guard. When she looked up at him, she sprang up crying, "Why, you are trembling! There are tears in your eyes! Daddy?"

She caught him in her arms, holding him close, moved as he was moved, adoring him as he adored her, and yet held apart by that unspoken thing.

All at once he caught her by the shoulders and held her from him.

"Rita, Rita," he cried passionately, "for God's sake, don't go on like this! I can't stand it. Don't go on playing a game."

"A game?"

"Yes, yes, just that! Everything you've said to me, everything I've said to you, every word has been insincere, meaningless, a mockery! We can't talk to each other any more. I come into your presence and I don't dare to raise my eyes to yours, — I'm ashamed."

"Oh, daddy!" she cried, the tears starting up in her eyes.

"You have locked yourself up against me!"

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he rushed on. "Against me, your father! Rita, it's between us — it's changed everything."

"That is the price we both have to pay," she said sadly.

"Yes, the bitter price! We are now like two strangers — afraid to speak, afraid to even guess each other's thoughts. Great God! Won't you understand?"

"Oh, yes, I do understand," she said heavily.

"No, no, you don't!" he cried rebelliously. "If you knew, if you knew what I've gone through these months, the doubt, the terrible doubt that has haunted me, driven me, tortured me! Don't you think I have a conscience — a conscience that suffers like an open wound, daily, hourly?"

"Oh, conscience!" He had unwittingly touched her in her secret pride, in the one disdainful passion she could not control. She recoiled from him, her voice shaken as she spoke. "Wait. My dear father, I have never reproached you for anything that has happened, understand me, for anything! That is true — believe me — never! You are wrong to bring this up. It is not fair to me — it is dangerous. For there are some things I can't control — and when you pronounce the word 'conscience'!" — She turned facing him, her eyes blazing. "Tell
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me, did your conscience torture you once, during those six mortal years I sold myself to my husband?"

"That was at least a marriage," he blurted out.

"A marriage!" Her laugh rang out scornfully, and, for once, all the barriers to her rebellious contempt of appearances suddenly carried away, she rushed on, heedless of the pain she was inflicting. "The sanctity of marriage! What difference do you think it made to me that a minister pronounced the sentence! A religious ceremony sanctifying an unholy thing? Never! I've met what I had to meet and seen it through! But don't talk cant to me! For then something in me rises up and I don't know what I say! And this from you, father, — a marriage! When did any minister ever forbid a marriage that was a mockery in the eyes of every one present, a young girl sold to a drunkard — a profligate, a libertine? Has a minister ever stopped a ceremony with a protest? Then what right have they or any one else to talk to me of the sanctity of marriage? The sanctity of marriage! I know what that means." She stopped, dug her nails into her palms, fought down her passion and added in her usual, measured voice, "No, no, daddy, let us look things in the face. I did what I did of

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my own free will, out of pride, my pride, to keep my family where it is to-day. That is true. *I* did it! I have no regrets, but I have no illusions! So don't answer me now — "That at least was a marriage." I sold my youth, my illusions, to a man whose very touch made me shudder — six years! And it was hideous!"

He had shrunk back before her rising passion, staring at her as though she had revealed herself to him for the first time.

"Rita, how you must hate me!"

"Hate you?" she cried impatiently. "No, that is n't fair! Hate *you*? What I hate is sham! For when you say things like that, you belittle what I did! Only a weak woman would try to gloss it over by calling it respectability: a weak woman, and I am not that!" She drew a long breath. "There, that's over. You should n't have brought it up. I knew it was dangerous. I've tried to avoid it." All at once she ran to him, knelt by his side and put her arms around him. "Hate you? Why, daddy, I'm not as petty as that! I've always decided for myself — no one else. I blame no one else. Why, daddy dear, I adore you! I would n't hurt you for the world!"

He raised his head at last, yielding to her affection.

"If you would only try to understand what I too have suffered."

"I do, I really do!"

"What hurts — because it changes everything," he began slowly, "is that now, for the first time, you hide something from me!"

She rose from her knees, drawing away from him. "That I cannot help!"

He sprang up in turn, crying, "When I stop to think that that man is coming here to-day — now; that he will come into my house, offer me his hand — it drives me mad! To go on, never knowing! It's the doubt, the terrible doubt. Rita, *what* was the bargain you made with Haggerty that night?"

She had thought that she had ended the crisis and suddenly it was on her again. Her anger flashed up, but as rapidly passed as she looked into his eyes and saw the remorse and the anguish there.

"Daddy," she said quietly, "this is hardly the time, I think, to discuss the conditions on which I saved you and the honor of our family. Remember that!"

"You are his mistress!" he cried, clenching his fists. "I knew it!"

"Wait!" She imposed silence on him by a gesture full of dignity and then, after a period

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of mental calculation, she said, "When a woman has twice done what I've done, she has the right to make her conditions!" But almost immediately abandoning her attitude of decision, she added, as though reasoning with herself, "But after all, what is the use? The terrible thing is I am in such a situation that nothing I can say to you, you will believe."

"Yes, yes, I will believe you!" he cried.

"But first," she said, throwing back her head, "we must understand each other. Father, if I answer the one question that is in your mind, will you give me your word of honor that this will end it?"

"My word of honor!"

"Never to reopen the subject again!"

"Never!"

"This is on your word of honor?"

"On my word of honor."

"Very well." She turned facing him, looking him full in the eyes. "You wish to know if I have been his mistress? Look at me. I am not and I never have been the mistress of Dan Haggerty!"

He came to her with slow steps, took her again by the shoulders, peering down into her eyes as though to pierce into her innermost thought.

"I don't believe you!" he said in a whisper.

"I am not and I never have been the mistress of Dan Haggerty!" she repeated, without flinching under his look, the most terrible and the most accusing glance that can pass between father and daughter.

"So —" he said at last, and, relaxing his hold, he left her, brooding and unconvinced, pacing back and forth, turning over in his mind what he had just been told.

"And that must end it!" she said peremptorily.

Suddenly he wheeled on her.

"No, that does n't end it!"

"Father!"

"You have lied to me," he cried, heedless of her indignant look. "What! You ask me to believe — no, no! Preposterous, unthinkable! You ask me to believe that a man like Dan Haggerty, who held me in the grip of his hands, ready to strangle me, would let me go for nothing? And lend me five million dollars besides? Do you think I am a fool, an idiot, a child to be put off like that!"

"I knew that it was hopeless. I knew you would never believe me."

"Oh, yes, of course, I know why you deny it. I saw it in your eyes!" he said miserably. "You

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did it to spare me. Yes, yes, that was it. I understand that. I don't blame you. Any woman would do that. But, dear child, it's different between us! Don't you see that! It's all my fault, my wretched fault! I must share it with you. It is wrong to protect me. I must share it, Rita. It is only justice. I ask it."

"Father, this must end it," she repeated coldly. "You gave your word to me. I will not answer a single other question."

"If Dan Haggerty did what he did," he burst out, "he did it only for one reason — because he wanted you. No other explanation is possible. And there is only one possible bargain you could make! Don't deny what I know — what must be so!"

"I have told you the truth," she said wearily.

"The truth! You have told me nothing! You have simply shut me off by a trick!"

"I am sorry, but that is all I shall ever tell you. I have my own dignity and my self-respect, and there are things which I must bear alone, that I cannot speak of even to you — especially to you. And this is final."

"No, this is not final," he burst out. "I have one thing more to say and you are going to listen to me."

She turned to go. He took a step forward

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and caught her arm. And at this moment, Phillips, entering, announced, "Mr. Haggerty is calling, madam."

She waited a moment, appraising her father's self-control with an anxious look. Then, turning, she said, "Very well, Phillips. I shall receive Mr. Haggerty here."

When the butler had left, she said quietly, "I think you had better go now, daddy."

"No."

He shook his head, drawing himself up, suddenly master of himself.

"When Mr. Haggerty calls on you, in my house," he said with an effort, "I shall always receive him."

She looked at him and a sudden warm wave of pride swept through her. He was of her race, as she liked to see him rising to the issue. *Noblesse oblige!*

Chapter XIV

When Haggerty came in, she was waiting near the door and, as he came forward, she made an effort to give him her hand.

"My father is here," she said under her breath.

He looked up with a start, saw Majendie and, after a quick glance from father to daughter, came forward.

"Hello. How are you, Mr. Majendie? Glad to see you."

He held out his hand, watching sharply for some indication to guide him to the situation. Rita, going towards the desk, saw her father slowly extend his hand, and, satisfied, stood turning over the leaves of the first book that met her glance. It had been a tense moment — one danger was past.

"You move fast, Mr. Haggerty," remarked Majendie in an even voice. "I've just finished reading about you in Washington, and the next moment you are here."

"And to-morrow I turn up in Chicago," said Haggerty, laughing.

"Really."

"Yes, I am leaving in an hour."

"For long?"

"No, I'm due back here Friday."

"I was interested in what you had to say on the Farm Credit situation — we all were," said Majendie politely. "It was very favorably received here. I thought it might interest you."

"Glad to hear it. Common sense, that's all."

"You are rather optimistic about Mexico," said Majendie making conversation.

"Very. When I return, there are some things there I'd like to talk over with you. At present," he pulled out his watch, glanced at it and said, "Mr. Majendie, I'm going to ask a traveler's privilege. I have jumped over here from Washington to have ten minutes' talk with your daughter."

"What?" A little taken back by his directness, Majendie glanced over at Rita and, receiving from her an almost imperceptible nod, replied with an enforced smile, "I quite understand. I wished, however, to have the pleasure of welcoming you to my house."

"Thank you."

"And assuring you that it will give us the

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greatest pleasure if you will dine here on your return."

By a supreme effort of his will, he succeeded in meeting Haggerty's glance a moment and again held out his hand.

"Thank you. I hope I may be able to accept that invitation."

Majendie went to the desk, picked up some papers and, stopping before his daughter, said, in a voice to be heard only by her, "I wish to see you immediately after this, Rita."

She made no answer but remained immovable by the table until he had gone out. Then she raised her head and looked at Haggerty. He came slowly and deliberately toward her until he stood so close to her that his body almost touched her.

"You know, of course, why I am here?" he began quietly.

She shrugged her shoulders, and, frowning, half turned from him.

"Look at me!"

She resisted at first, hotly resenting his peremptory tone. But all at once she turned on him, facing him defiantly, her hands against the table at her back bracing herself to resist him.

"So?" he said, after a moment of this mute

opposition. "Steeling yourself in your pride against me! Your pride, always your pride! And yet you love me and you know it!"

A look of anger flashed into her eyes. She answered slowly making each word a defiance, "I — do — not — love — you."

"Yes, you love me!" he retorted roughly. "Way down deep, underneath all your sham pride, the real woman in you, the woman that looks out of your eyes into mine, loves me! Something in you and me leaped up at the first touch of our hands. You don't deny that — you can't deny it," he rushed on, in his overpowering way. "That is true. Nothing else matters! Whatever has been between us in the past — blunders, misunderstanding, pride, prejudice — nothing can change that! Now I am free and I have come for you."

His voice had risen in a sudden passion. He caught her in his arms. She gave a little cry of fear and desperately hid her face from him against his shoulder, where she remained rigidly in his arms, a thing of stone. He held her a long moment, trembling at the impulse which had swept over him. Then slowly he released her and withdrew a step, saying, "Proud as Lucifer!"

Despite all her foresight and long preparation

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for any eventuality, that sudden moment in his arms left her with a little vertigo.

"You have bought *me*," she cried indignantly, "but nothing more." Then, as he did not answer but remained in indecision staring at her, a new feeling of triumph came to her. He had made his test and failed. Her courage and defiance surged back. She was herself once more.

"You thought it was as easy as that!" she cried scornfully. "Do you really think you can batter me down as you would a man — force me to love you?"

"You have always loved me," he repeated sternly. "Yes, from the first. If you call it battering down to tear away the barriers your false pride is building up between us — between your happiness and mine — yes, I am going to batter down whatever keeps you from me!"

"You think so? Do you wish to try again! Oh, you can humiliate me, torture me, break my spirit, but the thing you want you'll never get!"

He frowned at the ring in her laugh, stared at her a long moment, and finally said, "Let's talk this out!"

He sat down unbidden, drawing his hands up under his chin, considering the proper opening.

She remained standing, no longer fearing to meet his glance.

"I have come to ask you to be my wife," he said at last.

"And I refuse. I will never marry you, Dan Haggerty! That was not in our bargain. You neglected to specify that."

"Just what have you against me, I wonder?" he asked, as though addressing the question to himself.

"What?" She stared at him a moment incredulously, laughed and took a few steps away from him. But all at once as an inspiration came to her, she turned and faced him. "Dan Haggerty, do you want me to believe that you can love me?"

"Well?"

"Prove it now!"

"How?"

"Give me back my right to choose and abide by my choice," she said, with a little tremor in her voice.

"Not for one second!" he replied instantly. "Understand me. That's straight, flat and final! You are going to marry me and no one else in this world!"

"And you say you love me!" she cried with a quick feeling of dejection.

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"You bet," he said grimly. "But I'll win you in my own way. You can fool yourself, blind yourself, but you're not going to fool me! My business is to prove to you that you love me and that all the rest is just —"

"Please — please!" she cried, interrupting him with a gesture. "You have your pound of flesh — keep to your bargain!"

"Suppose we clear the air a little," he said sternly. "First, who proposed that bargain? You or I?"

"Why —"

"Who proposed it?"

She hesitated, not seeing quite where he was leading her, but finally she lifted her glance to his, "I did."

"It was not my suggestion?"

"Oh!"

She started to protest, but he cut her off peremptorily.

"Just answer my question. The suggestion — that there should be a bargain — did not come from me, did it?"

"No, it did not."

"Whatever terms were made were made by you, were they not?"

"Yes."

"Good. Now I'm going to say a few things

to you, Rita, that are n't going to be particularly pleasant for you to hear. However, they've got to be said. It's time to set a few things straight between us. Did you come to me and ask my assistance as one friend to another, — as one social equal to another?" He interrupted her movement of protest. "No. You flung yourself at me like a blow in the face. Why? Because even when it was a question of your family's honor, your father's life, your pride would not permit you to ask a favor of *me*."

"That is true," she admitted but without yielding.

"All very well from your point of view," — he said grimly, "and by the way, remember that you would not even ask me to sit down. I've not forgotten that. That was about the rawest deal I ever got. If there was any offense that night, it was that insult to a man who loved you."

"No, I won't admit that things were as you say," she began.

"Not now," he cut in quickly. "Later, when you think over calmly what I've got to say. You have a sense of justice and I appeal to that!"

"You would have given me something for nothing? You!"

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"Did you do me the common justice of trying first?"

"What I did, I had to do," she said rapidly. "You had planned everything. Remember that I was cheap. You gave up nothing but your revenge. I cost you only that. As for the rest, I was proud, yes, but only too proud to let you humiliate me!"

"We'll discuss that too. Humiliate you? Let's see. Yes, I had the power to humiliate you. True. You came to me and announced your bargain; you fixed the price and the terms, a flat business transaction. You refused even to let me sit down in your presence. Pardon me if I again refer to it—you see that has rankled."

"I had my reasons," she said stonily.

"Undoubtedly. That's what hurt. Now, Mrs. Kilblaine, do you remember that for a moment I hesitated, that I did not instantly accept? Do you know what was in my mind? If I had sought only to humiliate you, I had the opportunity there in my hands. I could have broken your pride once for all. I could have made you go down on your knees to me. I could have forced you to sue abjectly, hysterically, desperately for what you offered me so contemptuously! And you would have *had* to

do so! You knew it. I saw the fear in your eyes when you realized what provocation you had given me. Well, I did not do so. And yet I am just as proud in my way as you are in yours! Say what you wish about me — only don't accuse me of a lack of generosity."

She would not admit to herself the truth as he had phrased it. She sought desperately some way to turn his attack, some way that would extricate herself.

"Do you mean to tell me, Dan Haggerty," she said, returning in her confusion to her first contention, "that you would have done all that you did — just as a friend!"

"Not as a friend, Rita, but as a man who loved you! Yes, I would have."

"I don't believe you!" she said brusquely, her face flushing.

"I do not have to lie, Mrs. Kilblaine," he replied sternly.

"Wait!" She felt the desperate need of shaking off the effect of what he had said, which to her dismay had suddenly left her in doubt and indecision. "What you say sounds very plausible. But you are saying it now and not then. And after all, what were the facts? I had no choice. I came to you bound hand and foot. There was no escape. You had created that situation.

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I was yours. You knew it. I knew it. I accepted the situation in my own way, because there was no other way, and I scorned to cry out —”

“Yes, scorned,” he cut in grimly; “that is exactly the word.”

“Why not?” she cried, with a toss of her head. “That at least was frank and direct. Yes, I scorned to sue for terms, with a man who all the time knew that he held me in his hands. You aren’t going to deny now,” she added, her anger rising as she felt the returning strength of her position; “even though you would now have me believe that you could be capable of a disinterested act — you aren’t going to deny that you deliberately plotted to ruin my father!”

“That is true to a certain extent,” he conceded, frowning. “There may be certain things, however, about that situation, that you don’t know.”

“Do you call that fighting fair?” she exclaimed, rushing on.

“Now, you have come to the real point!” he cried, springing up. “Fighting fair? *You* say that? Rita, I fight as people fight me. I fought to win. Fighting fair? When did you or yours ever fight fair? You were once more candid.

You even warned me, I believe, that you were just amusing yourself. Have you forgotten that?"

"No. But it was a fair warning!"

"Was it? Now, just let me tell you this. From start to finish, you have chosen the battleground. You played a game that you thought you could not lose at, that you had played many times and always won. The mistake you made was in playing it with me. I am not quite the same type, Mrs. Kilblaine. I am not the sort of man it is safe to amuse oneself with. You lost. You must abide the consequences."

"I have not attempted—" she began indignantly.

"Just a little more first," he interrupted. "You may not know it, but men take women just as women want to be taken. You determine our attitude. Even a libertine will respect a young girl — a young girl who is innocent. When I told you my situation, directly, at once — the choice was in your hands. You made it. You wanted just so much of romance as you could have without danger. When you were afraid, you ran away without even so much as a word of explanation. What I felt or might suffer did n't matter in the least to you. You had your choice again here in New York, and

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you deliberately took it. All your pretended justification, your pretended frankness in warning me, was just the clever instinct of a woman of the world. You knew me with your rare knowledge of men, and you knew that to cry danger was but to lead me on, or you never would have done it."

"No matter, there is a difference," she said desperately. "You did come here as a friend to my house, and under cover of that you plotted the destruction of that home. I was at least open in what I did. You were not. You fought as a man of honor does not fight."

"Now I'll answer that!" he interposed with a setting of his jaws.

"No," she cried, carried away by her anger. "I will not discuss any longer. All that you have said to me," she said disdainfully, "has only proved what I knew. You have fought simply to save your own vanity. Love me? You don't know the meaning of the word!"

"Oh, yes, I do," he cried, suddenly changing his tone. "It's you who are blind; you who won't recognize what's in your heart; you who try to persuade yourself that you were just a selfish empty woman amusing herself! Why? Simply because for once you've met some one who looks in your eyes and tells you the truth. I

am stronger than you are, Rita, and that is why, when you come to acknowledge it, you are going to love me as —”

“No, never!” she cried indignantly, stopping him. She retreated a step, controlled herself and said icily, “This interview is exceedingly distasteful to me. There is only one question I want you to answer. Will you — once and for all — give me back my freedom?”

“No. I will not!” he said abruptly.

“Very well, then there is only one way left.” She went to the table and rang.

“So you are going to call in your father?” Haggerty looked at her with a smile of ironical satisfaction. “I rather foresaw this. Good! Call him in. Time we got to the truth — the whole truth.”

“So you refuse?” she said solemnly.

“I do — but with the greatest admiration,” he replied, smiling.

The butler appeared.

“Ask Captain Daingerfield to come here,” she said quietly. “You’ll find him in the billiard room.”

Haggerty for once was thrown off his guard and his face showed it. In his life he had gone through some dramatic moments, and for a swift second the thought came to him that she

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was capable of setting Daingerfield on him. He looked at her frowning, wondering, anger and admiration for her spirit equally balanced.

"Daingerfield, eh?" he said, recovering his self-possession. "Now I wonder just what this little game means? Go slow, Rita — go slow. There are certain elements of danger in this — for all of us. Think twice."

"It is you who force me to it."

"To what?"

"You will see."

"Um," he said thoughtfully. Then he smiled and added, "All right, let's see it through."

The next moment Captain Daingerfield had entered the room.

Chapter XV

When Mrs. Kilblaine had returned from Europe, Captain Daingerfield had met her at the dock as a matter of course, attended to her baggage and escorted her to her home. During her absence, he had supervised her stable and seen to it that her entries for the horse show were kept in the proper condition. It was a relationship long since established and accepted as a matter of routine on both sides.

Yet for the first time his *amour propre* was wounded by the eccentricities of her moods. They had always been the frankest of chums and if this fell far short of his hopes, it at least spared him the petty tyrannies of the ordinary sentimental attachments. To his amazement, he found himself in contact with a new Rita, a woman of indecision and changing temperament. At one moment she was all graciousness, at the next her capriciousness drove him frantic. There were days when nothing he did could

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please her, when she remained moodily aloof, captious and even openly hostile. The next, she would relent and send for him in a burst of remorse, atoning for the miserable hours she had inflicted on him with a sudden return to her old cheerful *camaraderie*. Not being, as he was the first to admit, of an analytical mind, he accepted this changed and changeable nature patiently, but without comprehension, vaguely alarmed and brooding over its portent.

When, therefore, one morning in the second week of her return, she had suddenly countermanded her plans for a ride in the Park and summoned him to the intimacy of her own salon, he was not surprised. He had gone with a vague hope that the moment had arrived when the mystery of her behavior would be disclosed to him. He found her nervous and agitated. She gave him her hand in a short perfunctory way remarking, "I'm out of sorts. Do you mind if we don't ride to-day? Sit down."

"If you'd rather I cut out —" he said, after one apprehensive glance at her face.

"No, no. I want you to stay," she cut in hastily. "Sit down. Take a cigar. Smoke. Make yourself at home. Don't mind me. I'll pull myself together."

"Oh, that's all right," he responded cheerfully, obeying her directions.

She brought him the cigars, lit a match and returned to the fireplace, her arm on the mantel, lost in a reverie that was unaware of his presence.

"Dick, I've been beastly to you," she said, turning suddenly. "Forgive me."

"Oh, well, what of it?"

She came forward to the sofa and sat down by his side, looking at him.

"Dick, you've never seen me like this before, have you?"

"Anything worrying you?" he said solicitously.

She laughed and rose again, but, almost immediately returning to his side, she extended her hand and laid it over his.

"Dick," she said impulsively, "I am going to ask —"

He waited, but all at once the expression in her face changed, and she drew back, frowning.

"No, wait, — not yet."

"Look here, Rita, you *are* upset!"

"No, don't talk. Let me think."

She sprang up nervously, made a turn of the room and again came to the sofa, standing at his side, looking down at him with such earnestness that he cried, "Why do you look at me like that?"

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"I am wondering if I really know you?" she said in a low voice.

"Know me?" he repeated, laughing. "What the deuce are you driving at? You've known me since we made mud pies together."

She shook her head.

"And yet — I wonder?"

"I say, I don't get that. I'm sorry," he said apologetically. "I'm afraid I'm not rather quick at getting things."

"Do we ever absolutely know any one?" she continued moodily, as though questioning herself. "We think we do and then a crisis comes — something extraordinary," — She answered some unspoken question with a shrug of her shoulders and then, resuming her seat, said rapidly, "Oh, yes, I know pretty well what you'll do under ordinary circumstances. I know your code. It is the code of a man of the world — of a gentleman. Of course, you've had your affairs — you must have many affairs — yet I know you have never pronounced the name of a woman."

"My dear Rita, that's only saying I'm not a cad."

"No, no, it's not so common nowadays," she persisted, clinging to her opinion. "I like that in you. A woman's name and a woman's honor

will always be safe in your hands. That's a good deal, Dick."

The intensity she put into this assertion surprised him. He looked up and was thrilled at the look in her eyes.

"It's an old-fashioned way of looking at things."

"Perhaps. I've studied you a long while, Dick, and I know you," she proceeded quietly. "If you married and your marriage proved a tragedy — no matter what the provocation — you would never drag before the public the woman who had borne your name."

"No, never. You know my views on that subject," he said, wondering at this interview which more and more assumed the tone of a cross-examination.

"Yes, Dick, and what is more, I know that you have lived up to them. I happen to know that in one case you kept your faith under very painful circumstances, when it hurt to do so. These are the ordinary things in life — the things that can be foreseen."

"I see," he remarked wonderingly. "Then it's something different?"

"Yes, something quite different," she said, in a low voice; "something extraordinary."

"Look here, Rita," he took up, frowning.

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"It must be something stiff. You're not running true to form. You've always met things like — well, like you take a stiff fence in the hunting field — up and over! By George, it must be damned tough if you hesitate now."

"Yes, I am hesitating," she hurried on. "Have I the right to put you to such a test?" she added as though to herself. "Yes, have I the right to bring you into this?"

"I'm not quick, I know," he said anxiously; "but I've felt, I've realized, well, ever since you've come back, that something's gone wrong."

She drew up instantly, alarmed and defiant.

"How have I shown it? What makes you say that?"

"You see, I love you," he said, troubled at the sudden antagonism in her look. "I happen to be hopelessly head over heels in love with you. That makes the difference. You feel things — and I have known — well, I've known for days that you've been going through hell, somehow."

"There's one thing I want to explain to you," she said, watching him as he paced nervously about the room. "I should have told you long before. Dick, you're an awfully good sort, and I have been beastly to you."

"Oh, a good sort?" he took up with a move-

ment of irritation. "Yes, that's the beginning and end of me. Damn it! Every one says I'm a good sort. Even Uncle Ben said so, after I sunk a hundred thousand dollars of his coin in that patent dredger. I'm just a little sensitive, Rita, about this 'good sort' stuff. It's all very well, but it does n't get you very far with a woman — not a woman like you."

"You're wrong," she answered, smiling at his outburst, and impulsively she added, "It's just your sort of man that is n't difficult to marry."

"That may be so — but where does my experience bear it out?"

"I don't know why you've stuck to me all these years," she said, looking at him profoundly.

"What the devil did I have to do with it?" he answered, shrugging his shoulders. "I could n't help myself, that's all. Can't remember when I was n't in love with you. Fate, that's all. After you married Kilblaine, I tried — good Lord, how I tried — to fall in love with a dozen women. No use. It's sort of born in me, I guess, to be loyal to one idea, like being a Republican and an Episcopalian."

"I came near marrying you six months ago," she said, point-blank.

To her surprise he shook his head, unconvinced.

"Never thought so."

Blue Blood

"Why not?"

"Because you have never cared for me that way, Rita. Oh, good friends — pals — all that sort of rot! But love? No. I've known you too long to fool myself."

"You know, Dick, I'm going to surprise you," she began with a smile.

"Go ahead."

"I always did mean to marry you in the end — even, even as a young girl."

"No?"

"Fact."

"Even when you used to treat me rough?"

"Even then."

"Well, I'll be damned."

"You know why I did n't; you know why I married Mr. Kilblaine," she added, with a shrug of her shoulders. "We've never talked about it, but of course you must have known my reasons."

"Well — your father's position was pretty well understood," he admitted.

"Did every one realize that?"

"Yes, rather."

"I suppose so," she said, lost in a moment's revery.

Suddenly he seemed to see light through the obscurity of this interview.

"Rita, is there anything to prevent you now?" he asked, his voice trembling a little. He took a step forward, then stopped. "There is. That's what you've been trying to tell me."

She looked at him and, to her own astonishment, she felt a sudden heat suffuse her face. She sprang up hastily and turned her back on him.

"Of course I know," he began lamely, "that there was trouble six months ago. But you went through that all right, did n't you?"

"Yes, I went through that."

"Well, then?"

She started to reply and then hesitated. Seeing her unwillingness, an idea came to him.

"Do you mind if I ask you something? You need n't answer if you don't want to."

"What is it?"

"I rather thought — in fact, Rita, I'd made up my mind — you'd marry Dan Haggerty — now that he is free."

"Why do you think that?" she said, chilled at the thought of what he might have guessed.

"Well, because I saw you liked him — very much. In fact, I'd rather made up my mind you would marry him."

"I hate him!" she cried with an involuntary outburst which she immediately regretted.

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"Then I don't understand," he said, staring at her. "If —"

"No, no, that's foolish," she interrupted hurriedly. "I did n't mean that."

"Yes, Rita, you did mean that," he said obstinately. "This sounds pretty serious. What is it you've been trying to tell me all this time?"

"Dick, I can't!"

"You can't?" He came closer to her. "Rita, Haggerty has got some hold over you or your father, has n't he?"

"Yes," she admitted inaudibly.

"I think I'm beginning to see," he said. "You went to Haggerty that night —"

"Dick!"

Her cry stopped him. They stood a moment staring at each other. Then suddenly she made up her mind.

"Dick, don't guess, don't guess even! Do you care for me enough to obey me blindly, unquestioningly?"

"Yes, but — look here," he cried, with an outburst of anger. "You're not going to marry him unless you love him, understand that! Not for your father's sake or any one else's sake. No matter what was promised!"

Her panic left her. At least that was all he suspected.

"Wait a moment." She drew her hand across her forehead. "Until I see Mr. Haggerty — and I shall see him now soon — I have no right to say anything further. Afterward —"

"Well, afterward," he took up quickly.

"Afterward," she said slowly, "it may be just possible that I may have to ask of you as much as any woman has a right to ask."

"I don't understand," he said, shaking his head.

"I don't want you to — now —"

"But you were going to tell me —"

"I was. I can't. I am asking you to trust me completely and to leave everything in my hands. If I am forced to it, if there is no other way out, you shall know everything without the slightest reservation. No — don't question me any further. I am dreadfully in need of your loyalty and your trust. Am I asking too much, Dick?"

"No, no, of course not."

"Mr. Haggerty is coming this afternoon at four o'clock," she said slowly. "Will you be here then? And wait for me in my sitting room until I send for you? Oh, it's nothing melodramatic," she added, at his movement of surprise. "We don't do things that way. But I wish to see you immediately afterward."

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"I will."

"And you will be absolutely guided by me," she said, "even if —"

"Even if what?"

"Even if I ask you to forget everything that I've said now?"

"I know you are in a devil of a hole," he said abruptly. "You need something from me. That's sufficient."

"Thank you!" She gave him her hand. "I know now that I can count on you for anything."

Chapter XVI

The moment that Captain Daingerfield entered the room, Haggerty perceived by the questioning look in his eyes as he approached Rita that he was not entirely in the secret. Up to the present, then, no deliberate trap had been laid for him. What she had done, she had done on the inspiration of the moment as a final threat. For he did not believe for a second that she had any intention of proceeding further than to try him out.

"What a woman! What nerve!" he said to himself grimly, with an involuntary movement of pride in what he loved.

"You sent for me, Rita?" said Captain Daingerfield.

She turned, indicating the third with a slight movement of her eyebrows.

"Mr. Haggerty."

"How are you?" he said without emotion and gravely he advanced, in a matter-of-fact way.

Blue Blood

"Wait!" Her voice stopped him. "It is not necessary to shake hands."

He turned nonplussed and stood frowning. Haggerty had not moved, waiting developments, smiling and alert.

She came forward and with a gesture indicated to each a chair.

"Sit down." She waited until they had taken their seats, the desk between them; then she came forward until she stood between them, and when she spoke it was quietly with a studied gravity. "I am about to do an unusual thing. I am going to do it because I am driven to do it." She waited a moment, looking at Haggerty for some sign of relenting. "Because this is the only possible way out of a situation in which I find myself. Each of you has asked me to be his wife. If I were free to choose, I would marry you, Dick, to-morrow."

"Free to choose! What do you mean, Rita?" said Daingerfield, starting up.

"Sit down, Dick," she said, without departing from the tired unemotional quiet of her voice. "Don't interrupt me. And this must be thoroughly understood. You are not in the slightest bound by anything you have said in the past. You are absolutely free of any obligation until you know the facts — all the facts."

"The facts!" he cried and suddenly looked at Haggerty.

"I have brought you two together to decide my life," she continued, "because you two alone have the right to make that decision. I shall expect you each to remember that my good name, that a woman's honor, is in your hands. You will each remember that you are here in my home and that under no circumstances, no matter what the provocation, can there be the slightest scandal. You are men of honor. I trust you."

For the first time, Haggerty spoke.

"Both?" he said, with his ironical smile.

"Yes, both," she replied, after meeting his glance a long moment.

"Thank you for that."

"There is only one thing to be considered here," she resumed, averting her glance again.

"It is my life that you two, here, between you, are to decide. Mr. Haggerty," she said, suddenly turning on him, "I have decided to marry Captain Daingerfield, but only if after a full knowledge of all the circumstances he does me the honor to ask me to be his wife. You understand what that means. I wish everything to be told. I wish nothing to be withheld, in justice to me — in justice to him."

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"One moment," he broke in sternly. "I happen to be a little concerned in this too. If the truth is to be told, I warn you I shall tell *all* the truth."

"That is what I wish."

"That means from the beginning to the end, omitting nothing."

"That is your right," she said coldly.

"But, damn it, what has Mr. Haggerty got to do with your right to decide anything?" exclaimed Captain Daingerfield, rising with a sudden flash of anger. Haggerty had risen, drawn to his feet by the challenge in the other man's eyes.

"Because, Dick," she said slowly, "because I actually belong to this man."

"By God, Haggerty," cried Captain Daingerfield, leaning forward over the desk. "What does she mean?"

She put out her hand between them and held them with a look.

"How I belong to him, in what way and why, I wish him to tell you without sparing a single detail." Then, as she felt the electric tensivity of the moment was becoming charged with danger, she said sternly, "Look at me, both of you. You are in my home. My family is here. You have my honor in your hands. Remem-

ber that. No scandal. Decide my life. I shall be waiting in the next room."

She left them and went slowly to the great Picci doors at the back, stood a moment contemplating them and then passed beyond.

For a moment they stood rigidly watching each other until the click of the door released their taut nerves. Instantly Haggerty's hand shot back to his hip pocket. But no answering movement came from Daingerfield. Instead he crossed his arms and said disdainfully, "That's one thing I did n't expect from you."

Haggerty laughed. "Just an old instinct," he remarked quietly. "A habit of finding out what the other fellow may have on him. You see the situation is rather unusual."

He brought forth a pistol, broke it and flung the cartridges carelessly on the table.

"Sit down," he said abruptly. "This is going to be a rather serious conversation. Now, Daingerfield, let's get at it."

Chapter XVII

Rita Kilblaine came through the great Renaissance doors and entered her father's salon. To her dismay, she discovered it already tenanted by her sister. She closed the doors quietly and leaned back against them a moment, thinking. Mrs. Chalfonte was at the tea table where Phillips was arranging the teacups. Evidently she was on her way to the bazaar and could be counted upon to leave shortly. But how shortly? The situation in the other room was tense and might come to the snapping point at any moment. At all risks, she must hurry the departure of her sister. She made these observations quickly and quietly, without departing from the stoic decision which had controlled her actions for the last half-hour.

"You have n't brought any lemon, Phillips," said Mrs. Chalfonte, who had not entirely recovered her equanimity.

"Here is the lemon, madam."

"Oh!" She turned to the butler fretfully,

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"Phillips, I just won't wait for mother any longer. Send word to her that I am leaving in five minutes!"

"Yes, madam."

"And Phillips," she added, with a sudden inspiration, "tell her the Vicomte de Chapdeloupe and I are leaving in five minutes!"

"Not gone yet?" said Mrs. Kilblaine, coming forward.

Her entrance had been so quietly effected that Mrs. Chalfonte gave a little start of surprise.

"When did you come in?"

"Just now. I expected you'd be at the bazaar."

"So did I," said Mrs. Chalfonte, crossly.

"You've made it up with mother?" Mrs. Kilblaine stopped at the table for a cigarette, which, however, she held in her hand without lighting.

"What can I do? Mother is too absurd for words! Really if you'd speak to her and make her realize that she is a grandmother and not a debutante —"

"No, I sha'n't do that."

"The only reason Pom Pom lets her order him around," said Mrs. Chalfonte irritably, "is because he thinks she's going to find him a rich wife. He is a mercenary little brute, but he says

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the most outrageous things and does dance divinely."

"I thought he was coming?"

"I won't wait for *him*! He can jolly well follow on. The way women throw themselves at him has quite turned his head. And here I've been waiting half an hour. You know how mother is. Perfectly impossible. Tea? And all she has to do now, goodness knows, is to put on her hat. A cup of tea?"

"What?"

Mrs. Kilblaine had not heard her. She had been walking thoughtfully about the room, passing and repassing the Picci doors, listening and wondering.

"Did n't you hear me? I said will you have a cup of tea?"

"No — No, thanks."

She went to the table, took up her needlework and, sitting down, tried to concentrate on it.

"And if I don't wait for her, there'll be a scene," continued Mrs. Chalfonte. "Really, mother is getting more difficult every day."

"Oh, mother's all right if you know how to humor her," said Mrs. Kilblaine absent-mindedly.

"Humor her? That's all right for you to

say," her sister retorted. "You impress her with your grand manner. I get the brunt of it. If anything goes wrong she takes it out on me. As though I did n't have enough to worry about at home! What do you think has happened now? The second governess is leaving just as the whole kitchen is walking out! Why? Because they can't agree on the Irish republic! That's what we've come to nowadays! Every revolution in Europe upsets your kitchen here! Now I'll have to spend weeks in filthy, smelly intelligence offices. Nice prospect! Rita, you're not listening!" she added suddenly.

"I'm sorry." Mrs. Kilblaine came out of her abstraction. "What did you say?"

"You can be *so* indifferent," said Mrs. Chalfonte reproachfully. "But of course you've never shown any interest in *my* troubles." She sighed. "Tommy's down again with a bad cough."

"Have you had a doctor?"

"Of course I've had a doctor! I live with doctors and trained nurses! How absurd of you to say that! As though I neglected my children. Really, you can be so unsympathetic!"

"I did n't mean to be."

She put down her work and started to rise impelled to return to the other room.

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"People who never have any troubles always act bored when you mention your own!"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Really, Rita!"

"Forgive me. I was n't listening," she said, taking up her work again with a nervous spasmodic movement.

"Well, you might at least pretend to be sympathetic!"

"My dear Cora," said Mrs. Kilblaine impatiently. "I can't see why you take things so hard! After all, if you have children — they are going to have colds. What of it? If you have a dozen servants they are going to fight and go off and you've got to change them! But you *have* a dozen servants. You *have* a town house and a country estate and an income you can't spend! So why worry yourself sick about little things? These are not the real troubles in life!"

"Well, since the day I was born!" exclaimed Mrs. Chalfonte indignantly. "So I have no troubles!"

"No," replied Mrs. Kilblaine curtly. "No, you don't have to work for a living, remember that!"

"Work for a living? Why should I work for a living? Oh, it's easy for you to be calm and unruffled, my dear," said Mrs. Chalfonte sar-

castically. "You've had the easy time. You've no children to worry about. Everything has been smooth sailing for you! Nothing but yourself to think about! No need to economize? You know very well I have to economize! It's unfair to say I don't economize! I'm the only one who does economize!" She took out her handkerchief. "Oh, Rita, you are cold. You are cruel!"

"Forgive me!" said Mrs. Kilblaine, shrugging her shoulders. "Don't sniffle, Cora; you'll get your nose red. Besides, it's mother who's upset you, not I."

She rose and moved to the back, her own nerves beginning to give way. The door slammed on Mrs. Majendie's entrance. She turned with an involuntary exclamation.

"Oh!"

"What is the matter with you?" said Mrs. Majendie in surprise.

"I don't know what made me jump," she answered hastily. "Nervous, I suppose."

"You need to get out of the house. You need fresh air!" exclaimed Mrs. Majendie, continuing to examine her unfavorably. "Do you good to take a ride."

"Yes, perhaps — later — with Dick," she answered incoherently.

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"Well, are you ready at last?" interposed Mrs. Chalfonte impatiently.

"I have half a mind not to go," said Mrs. Majendie doubtfully. "Why, where's Pom Pom?"

"He'll meet us there," said Mrs. Chalfonte quickly. "Mother, you've got to go. It would be too rude after you've promised to take a booth."

"I am not feeling at all up to it. Family scenes just reduce me to shreds!" Mrs. Majendie sent a reproachful look at her daughter. "I feel as though I could scream! I really am in no condition."

"Mother, you will have to put in an appearance. You must at least do that."

Mrs. Kilblaine said it calmly, yet inwardly she was in a panic. Would they never go!

"There's absolutely no end to these charities!" continued Mrs. Majendie, hesitating. "It's ten dollars here and ten dollars there! Really, it's a wonder we have any money left!"

"Now do come on, mother," said Mrs. Chalfonte in a soothing tone.

"Cora, don't hurry me! You make me nervous. I can't be hurried!" Suddenly Mrs. Majendie perceived the tea table and uttered an exclamation of pleasure. "Oh, tea! Just the thing!"

"But, mother, you'll get tea at the bazaar!"

"With all that crowd around? Don't be silly, Cora."

"We're an hour late now!"

"Is that all?" Mrs. Majendie shrugged her shoulders. "Well, I won't budge until I've had my cup of tea. So, Cora, it's no use frowning, no use in making a scene."

Mrs. Kilblaine made a sign to her sister and, going to the tea table, poured out a cup.

"It's only a second. Cream and sugar. There you are."

She brought it to her mother, who took it and looked at her in surprise.

"You don't expect me to take it at a lunch counter, do you?" she said acidly. "Just hold the cup. There!" She took off her glove, leisurely raised her veil and sat down. Mrs. Chalfonte, looking daggers, subsided into a chair. "The only reason I'm going is to see what the house is like. You put sugar in? My, how refreshing that is! To hear every one talk, you'd think it was a palace. Belle Stacey went through it the other day. Her husband has to keep up business relations, you know. What do you think? She told me the doors were composition — all composition. My dear, she tried them with her finger nail. 'Ours are

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real mahogany,' she said. Belle Stacey is a little purse-proud, too, you know." She looked over at Mrs. Kilblaine. "Aren't you taking tea, dear? Do. There is nothing so refreshing!"

"I suppose I might as well," she said and went to the tea table.

While her mother had rambled along, her mind had been wandering again. Her imagination was in the other room, trying to visualize the scene that was taking place there. For the first time, she felt herself going to pieces. She had brought matters to a climax with a decision and a calm which had surprised herself, as though she had somehow detached herself from her own personality and was standing like an impersonal bystander, directing the course of events. She had gone thus to the climax; the rest was out of her hands. Now she felt suddenly helpless, condemned to await an issue she was powerless to influence or direct. Impulse and anger had carried her so far triumphantly; now other emotions interposed, a fear of the unforeseen, an uneasy stirring doubt — an agony of suspense.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Majendie chirped along.

"There's only one thing to be said in favor of these charities in private houses. You do get a chance to go through them, without having

to meet the people socially. Still, nowadays, any one can get into society who has proper business relations — like your friend Haggerty, Rita. You'll see, he'll get in. In my time, it took ten years and then it could only be done through the church."

"Moth — er!" cried Mrs. Chalfonte, tapping the floor angrily.

Mrs. Majendie mistook the nature of the protest.

"Of course, it was done through the church! Look at the Staceys. Her mother never got anywhere until she joined Grace Church and founded a children's nursery. Then the Bannings — look at them — with all their millions! How did they get in?"

At this moment the young Vicomte de Chapdeloupe arrived.

"No reproaches, please. I have an excuse," he announced airily, with his usual impertinence; only this time Mrs. Chalfonte detected a trace of agitation.

"It will have to be a very good excuse!" said Mrs. Majendie righteously.

"It is."

He had passed ceremoniously from one to the other, lifting their fingers to his lips, familiarly with Mrs. Chalfonte, cavalierly with her mother

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and with marked deference to Mrs. Kilblaine, who overawed him.

"Well?" said Mrs. Majendie.

"My excuses first, my explanations afterward." He saluted them with another bow. "I am late, because the man in the room next to me selected this afternoon to shoot himself."

They laughed incredulously.

"Bosh!" said Mrs. Chalfonte. "When did you make that up?"

"Look." He extended his hand, which shook like a leaf. "Don't you think in these prohibition days this justifies —"

Mrs. Majendie uttered an exclamation of horror.

"You poor boy! How awful!"

Mrs. Chalfonte, going to a little cabinet, returned with a glass of brandy.

"Thanks," he said, taking out a handkerchief. "Quite absurd to be upset by such a commonplace event, but — ugh — when things happen like that just across your door!" He shrugged his shoulders and sipped his glass.

"How terrible!" said Mrs. Majendie, shocked, while Mrs. Chalfonte remarked, "What a heartless little beast you are, Pom Pom."

Mrs. Kilblaine was frowning with a sudden fixed stare at the clock.

"And we think there's no drama in the modern life," said De Chapdeloupe, recovering his poise. "You go into one of your modern hotels, a thousand rooms, a thousand mysteries! A man sleeps next to you, only a door between you. You hear him move about; you don't know his name; you don't see him, yet night after night, while you sleep on your pillow, he's sitting there staring down a pistol. He's a bankrupt. He has an incurable illness. There is a woman — always a woman — and suddenly — *bang* — he shoots himself — and you pick up the paper the next day to find out —"

"Pom Pom!" said Mrs. Majendie, closing her ears.

"Thanks!" He returned the glass to Mrs. Chalfonte and added "There you are — your modern life! Your own friend may be starving next to you and you never know it. A life is being snuffed out in the other room —" He snapped his fingers. "A life that may mean something to you — and you go about your little commonplace business and never suspect it!"

There was a crash and a saucer broke on the floor as Mrs. Kilblaine rose suddenly.

"Why, Rita!" exclaimed Mrs. Majendie and Mrs. Chalfonte in chorus.

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She looked down at the broken crockery, frowning.

"I'm afraid my nerves are bad too," she said hurriedly. "Your story is rather gruesome, monsieur."

"Oh, madame, so sorry! A thousand pardons," he cried.

"I've never seen you like this," said Mrs. Majendie, looking at her daughter.

"I have a dreadful headache," she volunteered desperately. "And I think, mother, I really think you ought to be going. It really is unpardonable to be so late. Monsieur de Chapdeloupe, I appeal to you."

De Chapdeloupe bowed contritely.

"I really don't feel like going at all," said Mrs. Majendie. "I was out of sorts and now —"

"Then I shall never forgive myself," said the young Frenchman, surprising a mute appeal from the eyes of Mrs. Kilblaine, who then turned and went to the window. "Come, beautiful lady!"

"You'll see no one will be there!" remarked Mrs. Majendie, drawing on her gloves. "The Dalgeeshes ought to be satisfied to have me at all."

De Chapdeloupe again made his excuses to Mrs. Kilblaine and, returning, offered his arm

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to Mrs. Majendie, who, with a last look at the averted figure of her daughter, was about to leave, when she uttered an exclamation.

"Oh!"

"Now what's the matter?" said Mrs. Chalfonte from the door.

"My lorgnon!" exclaimed her mother. "Where could I have left it? Oh, I remember."

To Rita's consternation, she started for the great doors at the back. For a moment everything froze within her. Then she said quickly, "Mother!"

"What?"

Mrs. Majendie had stopped at the sharp summons in her voice.

"Your lorgnon is on your neck," said Mrs. Kilblaine quietly.

"What? Why, so it is! How stupid! That shows in what a state I am!" She embraced her daughter. "Well, good-by, dear. I don't like to see you so weak and nervous. Of course, you won't come then."

"I don't know — perhaps — later."

"You really are a little feverish —"

"Don't worry about me — and please go!"

"She really is a little feverish," said Mrs. Majendie, turning to Mrs. Chalfonte.

"What nonsense. Nothing is ever the matter

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with Rita," replied Mrs. Chalfonte. "Come on, Benoit. If you come, mother'll follow!"

They were going at last. Mrs. Kilblaine breathed more freely. But at the door Mrs. Majendie turned.

"Oh, I forgot. I meant to tell Phillips there'll be four more for dinner."

"I'll attend to it," said Mrs. Kilblaine, holding herself in.

"The Warburtons and the Chaney's. You won't forget?"

"No. No. I'll do it now," she said hurriedly, touching the bell.

Mrs. Majendie remained, hesitating.

"I don't like to leave you like this," she began doubtfully.

De Chapdeloupe reappeared at the doorway.

"Moth — er!" he exclaimed in imitating the family tone.

"Impudence!" said Mrs. Majendie, brightening up. "Dear, dear. What excitement about nothing. I am coming."

They were gone at last. A moment after, Phillips appeared.

"Phillips, four more for dinner to-night."

"Four more, madam."

He moved towards the tea tray.

"Never mind the tea things," she said ner-

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vously. "Leave it as it is. I—I am not through yet. That's all. I'll ring when I want you."

Alone at last, she felt such a swift weakness that for a moment she steadied herself against a chair. Then she turned and going quickly to the door by which her mother had left, locked it. Then slowly she began to move toward the Picci doors, her pulse quickening, drawn by an irresistible fascination.

"Rita?"

She wheeled with a cry of dismay. Her father, the last person in the world she wished to see, was in the room.

Chapter XVIII

Mr. Majendie had come in a moment before and had been a witness to the feverish haste with which Rita had crossed over and locked the door on her mother's departure. He had waited while she stood swaying in indecision and had noted her movement to the back before he had called to her. When she had swung around with a cry, he said peremptorily, "Now we'll finish *our* conversation."

It was the last straw. She broke completely. Her eyes filled with tears, she came to him with faltering steps, and clasping her hands in entreaty, she cried,

"Daddy, not you too!"

"What is going on here?" he said, clasping her wrist. "Why did you lock that door? And who is in that room?"

"Daddy, I just can't bear it!" She looked at him with swimming eyes. "You must — you must let me alone just now!"

He remained deaf to her pleadings, his face

stern, his eyes searching into her soul with an intensity that left her cold with a new dread.

"Rita, is Haggerty in that room? Is he? And who is with him?"

She put her arms about his neck.

"Daddy dear, if you love me, for all that I have done for you — don't ask me any questions now! Later —" she added almost inaudibly, "later I'll tell you everything."

"Everything?" he cried, fiercely. "Then you did lie to me!"

"I did not lie to you!" she retorted desperately.

"Rita, this has got to be settled now and settled one way! Haggerty came here to ask you to marry him! Didn't he?"

"Yes."

"And you refused him?"

"Yes."

"Rita, I too am going to appeal first to the love that is between us. If you love me — for my sake — blame me, hate me, but for my sake, for *me*, Rita, don't refuse to marry him!"

She set her teeth and drew back from him with a quick return of her old courage.

"That I will *not* do," she said, looking him in the eyes.

"Not for me?"

Blue Blood

"Not *again* for you."

"Very well. Now listen." He drew himself up to his full height. "Am I your father and am I the head of my family? Yes or no?"

"Father," she cried, shrinking back. "Don't look at me like that!"

Never before had she seen such a look in his eyes or heard his voice set in implacable anger against her.

"The honor of my family is my honor!" he said slowly. "Now — understand me — I order you to marry Dan Haggerty!"

"You order me!" she cried, as though something had cut across her face.

"Yes, just that. Order you! No matter what I have done, no matter how guilty I have been in your eyes, there is one thing that has never been questioned in our family — the good name of our women! Don't talk to me of your sophistries!" he cried furiously, as she started to speak. "There is one thing that is deeper than anything else, that is part of my bone and flesh; to protect the good name of my daughter. And I will protect that by every means that is in my hands. Rita, I have never before in my life spoken to you like this. But now, I, your father, tell you what you've got to do!"

"I see!" She looked at him in a cold disdain, everything in her in revolt. "It's not a question of me, my life, my happiness, but of your conscience! For that you force me to marry a man I hate, who has trapped me like a wild animal!"

"Yes, I have a conscience, if you have not!" he cried impetuously. "You may sneer at such things, but it is here, always here! And for months I have lived with this nightmare! Good God, at the thought that I drove you into his arms, to shame — to dishonor — you whom I love as I love nothing else in this world —"

"Wait!" She stopped him with a gesture, and looking at him profoundly, shook her head. Then she said, with great sadness in her voice, "And to sell me again in marriage would quiet that conscience! How strange! How little we can understand even those who are nearest to us. And this would end your remorse! Respectability!"

"Do you intend to obey me?" he cried brusquely.

"To marry Haggerty? No!"

"Rita," he said and his voice trembled ominously, "I give you one more chance. Obey me or —"

Blue Blood

"Or what?" she said indifferently.

"Or I go into that room to Haggerty myself! And God knows what may happen then!"

The hand that pointed to the door shook. She saw it and sudden panic caught her at the thought of what this might mean.

"You won't do that!"

"I will."

He took a step toward the door.

"Father!" she cried, sinking to her knees, the room swimming about her. "I have never been the mistress of Dan Haggerty! Father, I'm not lying to you. I swear it to you. Won't you believe me?"

"No, I won't believe you!" he cried, his anger mounting. "Nothing you can ever say or do will make me believe that!"

"Daddy! Daddy!" she cried broken-heartedly.

"Now we'll see what Mr. Haggerty has to say!" he cried, taking a step towards the door.

"Daddy!" She sprang up, rushing after him. "Daddy, come back. Not that. Yes, I'll tell you — I'll tell you all!"

"At last!"

The violence of the moment, the red that had rushed into his vision receded. He drew out a handkerchief and put it to his forehead. Then turning to her, he said sternly, "The whole truth!"

"Yes, I am going to tell you," she said inertly. "To save us from disgrace, to save you from taking your own life even;" she began, staring down at the rug, "I made a bargain with Dan Haggerty."

"Well, well?" he cried impatiently as she hesitated.

"I promised that I would belong to him whenever he called me to him."

"What?"

She had said it so low that she was forced to repeat it.

"I knew it!" he cried. "Rita, Rita, why did you have to lie to me?"

"But I have not lied to you!" she replied raising her head.

"What do you mean?" He stopped short.

"He has not yet called me to him," she said in a whisper.

"What!"

He went to her, taking her arms roughly, forcing her eyes to his.

"Look at me! This is the truth?"

"Yes. Not yet — but I am bound, by my word of honor — any day — any time."

"Good God. I could n't believe it!" He fell back into a chair in a sudden revulsion, weak and fighting back the tears. "I did n't dare to hope."

Blue Blood

His revulsion of feeling amazed her.

"You don't understand," she said coldly. "Any day, any hour, he may call me. I am — I still belong to him!"

He brushed this aside with an impatient gesture.

"What does that amount to!"

He rose, tears in his eyes, and, coming to her, took her in his arms.

"My little girl!" he cried in a broken voice, and as when she had been a child, his hand stroked her hair, while he repeated again, "Thank God!"

"Oh, daddy, how hard it is to make you understand," she said sadly, disengaging herself. "I am bound — still bound by my bargain."

"He will release you."

"He will not release me!" she cried impatiently.

"But if he wants you to marry him! Can't you realize he loves you!"

"Loves me!" she cried. "If he loved me, he would have released me months ago. If he had only done that! I think I should have gone down on my knees to him. I should have worshipped him. But he did n't. Oh, no! That's not his way! He held me as in a vise! Do you realize what has been held suspended over

my head, day by day, week by week, month by month — what I have lived under?"

"And I tell you, Rita, that he loves you, and this is the very thing that proves it!"

"No," she cried indignantly. "He has had only one thought — to break down my pride, to humble me! To force me to come to him abjectly as his wife — to save myself from being his mistress!"

"Rita, it is you who are blind, you who won't understand!" He started up impatiently. "A man who has acted as he has acted, under the provocations we have put upon him, a man who holds such a power over you and does n't use it, I tell you is a man who loves you as a man loves a woman he wants to make his wife — whom he respects and reverences!"

"His mistress if I have to — his wife never!" she cried indignantly.

"Silence!" Again his anger boiled up and when he spoke again his voice was not under control. "Great God that I — I — should live to hear that from a daughter of mine! Pride, pride, pride, that's all it is!"

"Well, yes, I have my pride!" she cried with equal intensity. "What! Have you no pride? You'd deliver me, your daughter, to a man I hate and loathe — a man who has kept me in

Blue Blood

terror, day by day, scorning to use his power. Father, father! Think, — a man who came into our home as my friend and deliberately plotted to ruin you, plotted to force me to him to save the honor he himself had wrecked.”

“Enough!” he cried, again carried away by his rage. “I’ll settle this right now!”

And scarcely hearing her, not knowing what he intended to do, he started again towards the doors.

“Father!”

“Do you intend to obey me or do you not!”

“No.”

“We shall see!”

“Oh!”

His hand was on the handle when suddenly he stopped, caught by the memory of her final accusation. He came back, pressing his hands to his temples, struck by a sudden recollection.

“Wait — first.” He stood still, staring at her a moment and then took up incoherently, “You said — you implied, that — but you said,” he cried all at once finding himself, “that Haggerty plotted to ruin me.”

“While he came to my house as my friend!” she cried triumphantly.

“But that is n’t true!”

“My dear father, don’t!” she said, shrugging her shoulders. “He admitted it himself.”

"But it is n't true, I tell you!"

"Father — when he told me so himself!"

"Then he never understood you," he cried.

"But you're wrong — you're all wrong."

"What can you mean?"

"I mean he had a perfect right to do what he did!" he said slowly. "He did nothing but defend himself as any man has a right to defend himself when he is attacked. My dear girl, you're wrong, all wrong. You have n't understood!"

"Who attacked him?" she asked incredulously.

"I did."

"You?"

"There were others — we were a syndicate — you knew that, — but principally myself."

"You, my father!"

She stood staring at him, aghast.

"Rita, on my word of honor," he rushed on; "my sacred word of honor, it was as I tell you. We planned to ruin him, yes, planned deliberately. We fought him secretly. We thought we had caught him when he bought International Motors. We organized a pool to break the market. He fought us as we fought him. He fought only in self-defence."

"Daddy, daddy, no!" she cried weakly. "Do you realize what you are saying to me? It's unthinkable, horrible!"

Blue Blood

"It is done every day in Wall Street," he said lamely, avoiding her look.

"Oh!"

She pressed her hands to her throat. Everything seemed crashing to the ground before her. All the proud edifice of her self-justification had collapsed in a sudden paper flurry. She saw a new Haggerty. She understood swiftly all that she had set her obstinate will against.

"But then," she began, with a weak, sinking feeling, "then all that time, when he was my guest, my friend, invited by me to my house, you — *you* were plotting against *him*!"

"He was not my friend," he said desperately.

She shook her head.

"He was mine — and you used *me* to cover it up! That then was the true situation?"

He hesitated, sank into a chair and said in a low voice, "Yes."

"And all this time he must have believed that I — that I knew," she said, speaking to herself, "that I could be a party to a thing like that! And yet, and yet he spared me! Daddy, daddy, if you'd only told me!"

And at this moment, when this cry of remorse and defeat was wrung from her soul, suddenly, with a shattering crash, there came the sound of a pistol shot from the other room.

Chapter XIX

When Mrs. Kilblaine had left them, despite the insistent and threatening attitude of Captain Daingerfield, who remained facing him, hands clenched and prey to a nervous reaction that shook his body, Dan Haggerty experienced, strange to say, a sudden access of amusement coupled with the profoundest admiration for the audacity and imagination of the woman. He admitted to himself, with a grim smile, that she had succeeded in throwing him violently on the defensive. The situation was of extreme delicacy, not without its element of danger, yet he acknowledged the daring of the expedient which had completely taken him by surprise.

“Was there ever a woman like her?” he thought. “By Jove, I take my hat off to her! Well, she’s put me into a nice mess, and damned if I know just how to handle it.”

To gain time for reflection, he drew out his cigar case and proffered it.

Blue Blood

"Looks as though it might be a long session, Daingerfield," he remarked. "Have a cigar?"

Captain Daingerfield refused with a slight movement of his hand. Then deliberately producing a cigar from his own pocket, he lit it and sat down.

"As you wish," said Haggerty, shrugging his shoulders. The rebuff reminded him of Rita somehow. "They're all alike with their pride," he thought. He stood considering, and his glance travelling to the table, without reflection, he pushed aside the cartridges that lay there and taking up the emptied revolver, replaced it in his pocket. Then he took out his watch and frowned as he noted the hour.

"Before we get down to tacks," he said slowly, "I have a little business of my own to rearrange."

He took up the telephone.

"Hanover eleven thousand. That's it." He waited, his eyes on Captain Daingerfield, studying him reflectively as he turned over the possibilities of the situation.

He had no quarrel with the man opposite him. In fact, on the few occasions abroad, when during the war they had been thrown together, he had liked him as one man likes and respects another man, who is open, incapable of a petty

action and dependable in a crisis. Of his courage and loyalty there could be no question.

"Not more than one idea in his head at any time," he thought, "and it's plain what that idea is now. He'll hang on like a bulldog. We will have to go to the mat. Certain. Has she ever been in love with him by any chance? No — never. Quite capable of marrying him, though, to escape me. He'll see only what she wants him to see. That's going to be the trouble."

The telephone answered.

"Hanover eleven thousand? Haggerty talking. Who's this? Give me Haskins. Haskins? Yes, Haggerty talking. Change of plans. Can't make my train. Engage a special and have it ready. Notify Bromley to join me on it. Notify Chicago. What? Can't leave before — let's say two hours to be safe. That's all."

He leaned back in his chair, took out a cigar cutter and leisurely clipped the end, lit a match and puffed away vigorously.

"Now, Daingerfield, I'm ready," he said sharply. "Just what I'm going to say and how much I'm going to say — depends on you."

"In what way?" said Captain Daingerfield slowly.

"This situation should not have occurred.

Blue Blood

Every one of us is going to regret it later. I regret it naturally. You're going to regret a confidence you've no right to share. And Mrs. Kilblaine is going to regret it most of all. That's plain. You see, Daingerfield, she is not going to marry you. She is going to marry me."

"Suppose we come to the point," said Captain Daingerfield impatiently.

"Unfortunately, this happens to be the point," Haggerty retorted. "Don't lose sight of it. We're coming back to it. If she intends, really intends to marry you — yes, you have an absolute right to know everything. But if she is to marry me, as she is going to do — there are certain intrusions —"

"Mrs. Kilblaine answered that question five minutes ago," exclaimed Captain Daingerfield angrily. "All I wish to hear from you, sir, is by what right you pretend to interfere —"

"Oh, wait, wait!" said Haggerty, yielding in turn to his irritation. "If we begin on that tone, we shall get nowhere. Let me remind you, sir, if you have forgotten Mrs. Kilblaine's warning, that we are not two Sicilians with knives in our hands; we are not in a border town or in the Middle Ages. We are not here to quarrel or to spring at each other's throats. We are here, as Mrs. Kilblaine expressed it, to settle her destiny

and she clearly indicated that each of us had the right to do that, — each of us! That implies a little more on my side than you are perhaps figuring on. Believe me, Daingerfield, there is nothing simple about it. It is damned complicated. If we don't want a scandal — and my temper is just as quick as yours — we have got to deliberate over this quietly and with a certain toleration for the other's point of view."

Captain Daingerfield did not relish the lesson, but, after a moment's reflection, he acknowledged its justice.

"Very well then. Go on. But I shall state my position now. Mrs. Kilblaine is to be absolutely free to do what she wishes to do. Nothing you can say to me can change that."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing!"

"And if it is a question of Mrs. Kilblaine's responsibility for her own acts?" said Haggerty cautiously.

"I do not criticise a woman I love," replied Captain Daingerfield abruptly.

"I do. A little difference between us, Daingerfield. You put a woman on a pedestal. I prefer to keep her human. I'm afraid they prefer my method to yours."

Blue Blood

"Possibly," said Captain Daingerfield coldly. "But that has nothing to do with it."

"It has everything to do with it," took up Haggerty vehemently. "We have been talking about Mrs. Kilblaine's right to do this or that. That is n't the question at all. The whole question is simply this. Which one of us does she really love? Wait a moment. Can you honestly tell me from your conscience that Mrs. Kilblaine is marrying you, not to escape me, but because she loves you?"

"Mrs. Kilblaine alone must be the judge of that."

"On the contrary. She distinctly admits that she has no such right."

"I prefer, sir, that you give me some explanation of your assumed right to nullify her decisions," interjected Captain Daingerfield. "All this is merely beating about the bush."

"Yes, that is true," Haggerty admitted slowly. "It is beating around the bush, because I very much dislike to do what you are forcing me to do."

"Well, sir, I am waiting," said Captain Daingerfield peremptorily.

"Yes, so I see," remarked Haggerty dryly. He appeared to be deliberating between two courses of action, for quite a moment elapsed before he

began, "So be it then. Now to clear the air a little. At the present moment you are sitting there ready to fling yourself at my throat. You look on me, probably, as some social monster escaped from the covers of a servant girl's novel; the stock villain of fiction pursuing a defenseless woman. Get that idea out of your head. And now to relieve the tension a little, I'll tell you at once that Mrs. Kilblaine has never been my mistress."

Captain Daingerfield looked at him.

"Of course you don't believe that?"

"On the contrary," he replied, after a moment's deliberation, "I could believe nothing else."

"Bravo," said Haggerty, smiling. "You run remarkably true to form. However, you don't believe anything of the kind. You think I'm lying like a gentleman, as you may have lied yourself. However, what I said happens to be true. We'll come back to it later. What!" he exclaimed with some heat, as he perceived what little credence his statement had achieved. "Do you think I'm the sort of man who buys a woman bag and baggage against her will? I know what that's worth, and my dear fellow, I happen to be worth a little more than that."

A flash of anger and of pride accompanied

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these words. Captain Daingerfield for the first time was shaken in his convictions.

"What then," he said slowly, "did Mrs. Kilblaine mean when she said she belonged to you?"

"You do not know then?"

"I know nothing beyond what was stated in your presence here a few minutes ago."

"Mrs. Kilblaine referred to the terms of a bargain proposed by her to save her father from the consequences of his own acts," continued Haggerty, carefully choosing his words. "Perhaps now you can realize just why I hesitate to go further. To do so is to pass criticism on the woman who is to be my wife. That is a little different from your point of view."

"However, I must insist."

"You insist then on forfeiting the friendship of a lifetime? For that is exactly what will happen. Once married to me, Mrs. Kilblaine will never forgive you such knowledge — no woman would. I warn you."

"I do not admit your assumption, and I again insist."

"Every situation has been of her making, and of her own free choice," said Haggerty, hesitating no longer. "We met by accident, in a way that was rather out of the ordinary.

It appealed to her imagination. From the first, I loved her and she loved me, not consciously, perhaps. She knew the situation as regards my wife. I told her of it at our first meeting. There was no misunderstanding there. For two weeks we saw each other every day alone — by her own decision. She may not have realized at first just what her feelings were, but she certainly came to realize that she cared, for she suddenly ran away, over night, without a word of warning, without even a written explanation. That was rather rough. However, pass over that. I accepted her decision. I made no attempt to follow her. I did not even write to her. When I came to New York, I called. She was out. From my point of view, that ended it. What happened? We met two or three times casually at dinners. I made no reference to what had gone before. I made no further attempt at calling.

“Mrs. Kilblaine was a free agent, a woman of the world with a remarkable knowledge of that world, as you will admit. She was not forced to see me again. But, for her own reasons, she chose to do so. I did not enter her home until I came at her own express invitation. She knew exactly what that meant. She is a very frank person, as you

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know. She admitted to me that if I had been free, she probably would have married me. By inference, it was plain that she cared enough for me to wish to go on seeing me. She warned me that it would be a test of strength and a test of wits, and she admitted that she was very well satisfied when I refused to take the warning. You see, she enjoyed playing the game with some one who was — well let's say a little more difficult to restrain than the usual social type she had dealt with — no offense, captain. I was equally frank and warned her that I was not the sort of man who could be played with. I don't relish telling you this — but you've left me no choice. She chose the battle field and the terms of the struggle. Remember that.

“At this point Mr. Majendie injected himself into the situation. He was in a dangerous financial position.” He stopped abruptly and considered. Should he reveal the full extent of the disgrace which had been averted? It was a temptation, but a temptation he instantly dismissed. There were certain weapons he scorned to employ, even in such a crisis. “I sha'n't go into that. Part of it you may guess. It is sufficient to say that, faced with bankruptcy due to unfortunate speculations,

Mr. Majendie hit upon the dangerous expedient of attacking me in International Motors. He formed a pool to break the stock, believing I was unprepared and expecting to make a killing. This, my dear Captain Daingerfield," he said, with a touch of irony, "was done while I was coming to his home as a guest. With your fine point of honor, you will appreciate this at its full value."

"Mrs. Kilblaine was never a party to that!" exclaimed Captain Daingerfield.

"No — no," said Haggerty slowly. "I do not believe that now. No, she could not have known that, and I am not sure from something she said to me, that she even now appreciates the situation. However, the attack failed — as you know. Mr. Majendie was, let us say, in a position of the greatest peril — you can make it as strong as you wish and then you won't be wrong.

"The plain fact is that not one single friend either could or would help him. Mrs. Kilblaine unfortunately has one fatal fault — pride. Her pride would not permit her to ask my assistance as a friend. She disdained to do that. She preferred to make a bargain with me."

"And that bargain was?" said Captain Daingerfield, who was on tenterhooks.

Blue Blood

"Her own words were, 'Save my father and I shall belong to you whenever you call me to you.' There were certain other little details that were rather rough — that is to me — but that is how Mrs. Kilblaine now finds herself, in the present situation. Now you have it."

He ceased, and drawing back a little in his chair, waited the next move.

"So I am to understand that you put all the responsibility on Mrs. Kilblaine?" said Captain Daingerfield, with a note of scorn in his voice.

"And where would you put it?"

"Haggerty, you rather surprise me."

"In what way?"

"I thought you were a better sport."

"I don't get that."

"I don't imagine," said Captain Daingerfield, looking him in the eye, "that you've lived the life of a monk?"

"I'll concede that."

"You've played this game as you've played others before. It's a game that has its own rules and in playing it you accept the consequences. I don't quite see you in the rôle of the innocent victim. Does n't quite fit your character. What I see is that you have met your match for once. But I did n't expect you

to cry out. When you've lost, you grin and bear it."

"But I have n't lost, Captain," he answered pleasantly.

"I beg your pardon, sir; you have lost."

As he said this, the look which accompanied the studied calm of his words was full of a flaming menace.

"Before we take that up, let me correct you. It's evident that you have completely missed the point. I did not give you this explanation to complain or, as you express it, to cry out. As you say, it's a game that makes its own rules. No, Captain, what I wished to make evident to you is this; that Mrs. Kilblaine from the beginning has acted with me as only a woman could who loved deeply and honestly."

"Honestly?"

"Yes, that's the word. For if after hearing what I have told you, you are unwilling to admit that Mrs. Kilblaine was in love with me, you pass a much severer judgment on her than I have ever been willing to make. Well, sir, which is it?"

For a moment, Captain Daingerfield made no reply. He sat there, drumming on the table with his fingers, plainly at a loss.

"You are right," he said at length. "Mrs.

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Kilblaine could act only honorably. For a certain period, she must have been in love with you."

"Good, we are seeing light. I am losing a little of my glamor as a villain."

"If I admit that," said Captain Daingerfield, frowning, "that is no proof that she did not have the right to change her mind at any moment, for good and sufficient reasons."

"I'll be as frank with you," responded Haggerty, nodding his head. "Just at present, she is convinced she hates the sight of me. Why? Because I have played her game and been too strong for her. It is her pride alone that is suffering, but that pride is blinding her to what she really feels."

"I can concede all this, but I will not concede that you can interfere in her right to take any action for any reason whatsoever."

"I'm sorry, for that is just what I intend to do. You see, Mrs. Kilblaine does n't happen to be free." He said it quietly, and with a challenging smile awaited its effect.

"You intend to hold her to her bargain?" said Captain Daingerfield with an ominous restraint.

"I don't want to. Naturally, only of course as an extreme expedient. There is, however,

one eventuality that might force me to it—if she should be mad enough to carry out her threat to marry you!”

“By God, Haggerty, that’s too much!”

He sprang up and stood impending over his rival, flesh and blood impelling him to seek the other’s throat.

“Sit down, sit down, Captain. Don’t ask me questions if you don’t want answers. Don’t forget that I control the situation and that I don’t relinquish what I hold. Yes, I have a weapon I intend to use to prevent a woman who loves me from throwing her life away in a moment when she is incapable of a calm judgment.”

“Do you know what you are driving me to?”

As he spoke, Daingerfield folded his arms and dug his fingers into his flesh to control his rage.

“Something melodramatic, probably.”

“I shall ask Mrs. Kilblaine to marry me to-night, and then —”

“And then if I interfere,” interrupted Haggerty quickly, “you will kill me. Now that would be a pity. You probably don’t get that. It would be a pity, because my life is a big, constructive one and yours is one that does n’t count, except to yourself, of course. But you won’t do that, Captain, and I’ll tell you why.”

Blue Blood

“Well!”

“If anything like that should occur, my secretary would publish a little memorandum I shall leave. It might not send you to the chair — we are sentimentalists — but Mrs. Kilblaine’s reputation —”

“No one would believe —”

“Excuse me, every one would believe just one thing, the only thing that would lead a man like yourself to do murder. Every one, Captain Daingerfield, will believe, and you know it, just what you still believe yourself, that Mrs. Kilblaine has been my mistress.”

Captain Daingerfield dropped back into his seat and remained staring at him.

“That’s better,” said Haggerty grimly. “Now since we’re through with heroics, let’s take our bearings again. I am a rather obstinate man, primitive, if you wish. I am not of your social traditions, and I am not at all bound by your social formulas. I have acted under great provocation with a great deal of generosity. But on one point my mind is made up. Mrs. Kilblaine loves me and I am going to make her recognize it. It may take a month, it may take a year. But meanwhile, unless she marries me, she is not going to marry any one. What are you going to do about it? Oh,” he added

quickly, at a look in his rival's eyes, "I know what you'd like to do. But practically and sensibly — what are you going to do?"

Captain Daingerfield rose and, turning his back, began to measure off the rug. Haggerty brought forth another cigar, and while he awaited the result of this deliberation, he amused himself with arranging the cartridges in different figures.

Minutes passed and still Daingerfield continued his slow and thoughtful pacing. At last he turned and, coming to the table, reseated himself. All traces of anger had left his face and, when he spoke, it was with a calm and a courtesy which pleasantly surprised the older man.

"Haggerty, you are right in one thing; the only question is — which of us does she love, that is to say — well enough to justify a marriage."

"I'm glad you see it, Captain," said Haggerty, meeting his look with one of equal candor. "We are back, as I told you, to where we started."

"Exactly. Haggerty, I have always liked you. In fact, I've rather stood up for you on one or two occasions."

"Thank you. But don't try to appeal to my

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better nature," said Haggerty, smiling. "I have n't any."

"On the contrary you have. You see, I believe absolutely what you've told me. I am certain that you have never exercised any rights over Mrs. Kilblaine and I know that you genuinely love her."

"And so?"

"And so it is only a question how long it is going to take Mrs. Kilblaine to convince you she does not love you."

"Or the contrary, Captain."

"Or the contrary. On one point I am sure I have n't misunderstood you; unless Mrs. Kilblaine should attempt to marry me or some one else, you have no intention of exercising your rights under her bargain."

"So long as Mrs. Kilblaine remains unmarried, that is perfectly true."

"It, then, is simply a question of time. If at the end of, let's say, one year, Mrs. Kilblaine remains fixed in her determination not to marry you, are you willing to receive that as sufficient proof that she does not care for you and restore her freedom?"

"I have conceded a great deal already," said Haggerty, frowning. "At the end of one year, ask me the same question and,—"

broke off, turning from this thought to another, which presently expressed itself in a sudden irritation. "One year, one year! That's entirely too long a time for me to wait and again, it may be entirely too short a time for her." He seized the cartridges in his hand like so many jackstones, shaking them nervously as he stared at the table. One of them, escaping, rolled towards the floor. He caught it before it had slipped from the table and absent-mindedly reached for his revolver to replace them.

"Now that we are on amicable terms," he said, breaking the weapon and inserting the cartridges, "we can dispense with these." All at once his glance lit up. He put down the revolver on the table and sprang up with an exclamation.

"By Jove! Why not?"

He took a turn and remained a moment staring at the Picci doors; then turning, he approached Captain Daingerfield, who was waiting in mystification.

"Captain, I think I have an expedient. You want to know and I want to know what's really in the bottom of the heart of this woman. I believe I've got the means at hand." He pointed to the revolver and sat down, with an excitement that showed itself in a rush of words.

Blue Blood

"You see those doors at the back? They came from the Picci Palace — rather curious doors — I happen to know something of their history — told it to Mrs. Kilblaine once. There's a cut — a nasty ugly gash on them where a murder was consummated once. Bartolomeo Picci suspected his wife of being in love with another man and accused her of it. She denied it, faced him, laughed it down. With true medieval deviltry, he trapped her lover, murdered him and nailed his body to these doors where she would find it when she stole out from her room to meet him. The shock caught her unprepared, she cried out her lover's name, and her secret was disclosed.

"That gave me an idea — this revolver another. A shock — a sudden, unexpected, even a dreaded shock, may reveal to us what we want to know — to all three of us. Now what is the situation? At the present moment, Mrs. Kilblaine has been waiting in the other room, minute after minute, expecting something to happen. Unless I miss my guess, she is frightened to death of what may happen. She knows you, and she knows my temper. She acted impulsively, but now she is dreading what may be the consequences. Big men, human men, in our position, sometimes see red —"

"I think I see your plan."

"My plan is to fire one shot and abide by the result, if that result is clear to each of us."

"How can it —"

"I mean," said Haggerty impatiently, "that if, on hearing that shot, Mrs. Kilblaine believes one of us has been killed, she will cry out the name of the man she really loves."

"Yes, probably yes," said Daingerfield slowly. Something held him back; something he could not analyze. Yet after all why could he object? He shook off his premonitions angrily and said, "I believe you are right. But will you abide by the test also?"

"If Mrs. Kilblaine calls out your name, I shall be convinced, yes."

"Of course, then there is nothing for me to do but to agree," said Daingerfield slowly.

"Agreed on both sides then."

Haggerty spoke quietly in a matter-of-fact tone. He took a cartridge and extracted the bullet with his knife, blocking it with a piece of his handkerchief. Then, inserting it in the chamber, he signalled to Daingerfield to follow him. When they stood side by side, just back of the Picci doors, he nodded amicably and pulled the trigger. Side by side they stood there, waiting.

Chapter XX

For a moment after the shot had resounded through the house, the two men stood erect and listening. They heard Mr. Majendie's voice cry out, "Good God!"

Then again nothing.

Only a few seconds intervened, but to the two waiting the turn of fate, it seemed horribly, unnaturally endless. . . . Then Rita's voice in a cry of agony!

The next moment she had flung open the doors and, heedless of all else in the world but the horror in her soul, thrown herself into the arms of Haggerty!

He caught her strongly to him. She lay against his heart, quivering, frightened, calling him hysterically by name. At the dining-room door Mr. Majendie appeared, startled, uncomprehending, trying to pierce the mystery of the scene.

"Well, Captain, convinced?"

"Quite."

Captain Daingerfield drew himself up and,

like the good soldier that he was, raised his hand in salute to the victor. Then he turned and left the room.

"My apologies to you, Mr. Majendie," said Haggerty. "I think you can guess the situation now. If I may suggest, it would be just as well to reassure the servants. Accident — no one hurt — and I'd like to be alone a moment with your daughter."

So swift and weakening had been the moment of terror through which she had passed that Mrs. Kilblaine remained still, unresisting, in a state of collapse, scarcely hearing what was said. Now, with an effort, she raised her head and met his eyes, close and looking down into hers.

"You are not hurt?" she said faintly.

"Not in the least."

Her fingers ran over his shoulders and passed rapidly over his temples, as though seeking the evidence of their senses, while, still in a daze, her eyes continued distended, staring at him.

"I thought —"

"Forgive me," he said gently. "It was a cruel test. I had to do it."

"What do you mean?" She frowned, striving to collect her senses, the room still hazy about her.

Blue Blood

All at once her brain cleared. She drew herself away, her arms braced against him.

"Oh, a trick!" she cried furiously.

"No, Rita," he said solemnly, "a test. The only way to keep you from making a tragedy of three lives; the only way to show you what you really felt."

"Let me go!"

With a strength born of her anger, she wrenched herself free. But the next moment he was at her side, catching her up again in his arms.

"No, never! Never again!" he cried, bringing her to him. "What have you got against me? That I fought for you as others fought me? That I have dared to show you your own heart? For you love me. You know it now, and I know it! No matter what your pride cries out to you — your heart has answered! You love me!"

"No, no! I won't be taken like this," she cried, twisting in his arms in a fruitless attempt. "Always compelling me — always battering me down."

"Always! Relentlessly. For your happiness and mine!"

Her arms were still braced against his breast, and she drew back her head, proudly and defiantly.

"Dan, you cannot win me like this," she cried.

"Rita," he said with a sudden change to sternness. "I warn you — once and for all. It must be yes, now, — or I go out of this room, and if I go, it is final."

She knew by his voice that he would do it. It was surrender or the end. For one breathless moment everything swirled around her. Then, beaten, she resorted to a sudden yielding weakness.

"But, Dan, don't you understand, don't you see I want to be free to choose?" she said tearfully. "Won't you give me that right?"

"Not for one second, not in a million years!"

"Oh, you are too strong!" she confessed with a half sigh. Her arms relaxed and her body, in a soft surrender, allowed itself to be drawn up to his. She smiled and her arms closed over his shoulders. "Too strong," she repeated in a whisper. "Thank God!"

